

## Wednesday in Holy Week

Fareham 2020

### Prayer:

Saviour Christ,  
you take upon yourself all our burdens.

You free us from all that weighs us down,  
so that we constantly begin anew.

You lead us on, with lightened step,  
from worry towards trusting,  
from weariness towards well-being,  
from our own will towards the vision  
of your coming kingdom.

Make us servants of your gospel,  
that we may know your peace  
and the world be bright with hope.

Amen.

The Lectionary gospel reading for Wednesday in Holy Week is John 13:21-32.

On the next page are the verses in The Amplified Bible (1954, 1987) which shows alternative nuances of translation. [There also exists a rewritten 2015 edition of this version that I find less detailed and helpful].

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## John 13:21-32 Amplified Bible Original Edition

21. After Jesus had said these things, He was troubled (disturbed, agitated) in spirit and said, I assure you, most solemnly I tell you, one of you will deliver Me up [one of you will be false to Me and betray Me]!

22 The disciples kept looking at one another, puzzled as to whom He could mean.

23 One of His disciples, whom Jesus loved [whom He esteemed and delighted in], was reclining [next to Him] on Jesus' bosom.

24 So Simon Peter motioned to him to ask of whom He was speaking.

25 Then leaning back against Jesus' breast, he asked Him, Lord, who is it?

26 Jesus answered, It is the one to whom I am going to give this morsel (bit) of food after I have dipped it. So when He had dipped the morsel of bread [into the dish], He gave it to Judas, Simon Iscariot's son.

27 Then after [he had taken] the bit of food, Satan entered into *and* took possession of [Judas]. Jesus said to him, What you are going to do, do <sup>[a]</sup>more swiftly than you seem to intend *and* <sup>[b]</sup>make quick work of it.

28 But nobody reclining at the table knew why He spoke to him *or* what He meant by telling him this.

29 Some thought that, since Judas had the money box (the purse), Jesus was telling him, Buy what we need for the Festival, or that he should give something to the poor.

30 So after receiving the bit of bread, he went out immediately. And it was night.

31 When he had left, Jesus said, Now is the Son of Man glorified! [Now He has achieved His glory, His honour, His exaltation!] And God has been glorified through *and* in Him.

32 And if God is glorified through *and* in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and He will glorify Him at once *and* not delay.

## Wednesday in Holy Week Discussion

### Part 1: 6 theories about Judas *[my originally intended material]*

People in the church have been debating or arguing about the character and motivation of Judas throughout most of its history; certainly since before AD 180 when Bishop Irenaeus denounced an – until recently – lost Gospel of Judas. [More about this later – see end of Part 2].

If you google “therories about Judas” you will, in less than 1 second, be presented with about 1,540,000 results. Because of time constraints, I propose that we lay aside for this evening the Islamic tradition and others derived from beyond Judao-Christianity. That still leaves some mainstream theories or insights that have surfaced repeatedly over the past 2,000 years. Here I have selected just six that you might feel inclined to consider:

1. Judas was the only apostle who didn't come from Galilee, so he never properly integrated into the group.
  2. Judas was a zealot who grew disillusioned that Christ was not taking up physical power over the Romans.
  3. Judas was a zealot who tried to get Christ into a situation where he would be forced to reveal his power and to act against the Romans.
  4. Judas was against the zealots and was worried that if Christ was led to act against the Romans there would be further savage reprisals against the Jews, and so he took steps to prevent this situation occurring.
  5. The name 'Judas' is etymologically closely related to the word for 'Jew' or 'Jewish' (e.g the country of Judea – the land of the Jews). Judas' betrayal of Christ is therefore perhaps a kind of parable depicting the rejection of Christ by all of the Jews.
  6. Judas' betrayal of Christ, and the Jews' rejection of Christ, have been used as the justification for much anti-Semitism over the centuries. The words 'Judas' and 'Jew' still sound very like each other in many European languages. Embarrassment over the anti-Semitic episodes of its own history led the church in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to seek a less condemnatory view of Judas.
- Any initial reactions?

Some of these theories reveal a willingness to ascribe a rational motive to Judas (however misguided) beyond pure evil or greed.

- does this reflect a greater compassion towards/tolerance of/ understanding of “outsiders” or “social misfits” over the passage of time?
  - with the insights of modern counselling and psychology, has the church been too harsh in its condemnation of Judas over the centuries?
  - what might Jesus Himself say?
  - *[end of originally prepared material]*
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## **Part 2: Optional extra reading**

### **First Postscript**

Some of the above insights and theories reappear combined and refined in an influential book published in 1851. Its full title is “Lectures on the Characters of our Lord’s Apostles and Especially Their Conduct at the Time of His Apprehension and Trial / by a Country Pastor”

The “Country Pastor” was the flamboyant and outspoken social and political radical, the (Anglican) Archbishop of Dublin Richard Whately D.D. – Oxford theologian, supporter of political and religious rights for Dissenters, and campaigner for Catholic Emancipation and the granting of civil rights to Jews.

By 1900 Whately’s theories had found popular expression well beyond the customary theological and ecclesiastical circles. Popularised Whately maintained that, in contrast to the other apostles, who Judas saw as untutored fishermen, Judas was from the city and considered himself their intellectual superior. He loved questioning and debating with Christ - he loved tussling intellectually, which in a way the other young fishermen weren’t up to doing; they just asked questions and tried to learn, and realised they were dealing with something exceptional.

Judas wanted to try and get Christ to show himself, says popularised Whately. Whately and his followers suggest that the organisation of the arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane was a stage-managed plot by Judas to encourage Christ to be forced to demonstrate his supernatural power and break the chains of his arrest. And of course Christ said to him that what is happening is what’s meant to happen, and you’re just following on from what was prophesied so many years ago.

And so Judas realises his terrible error of judgement, and his suicide follows as he realises that his dreams haven't come to pass, and that he's actually overstepped the boundary, that he's been guilty of hubris, and intellectual arrogance, - but not *betrayal* in the traditional sense.

In his 1851 book *Whately* (who always sought to stay thoroughly grounded in Scripture) turns this into a sermon about the terrible consequences of actions without prior insightful thinking; illustrating his point with reference to the resultant historical cruelty and intolerance of the church:

“...there have been many Christians who have thought it their duty to God (for there can be no doubt that many persecutors have been sincere) to burn heretics, or to enact various penal laws against the maintainers or teachers of false doctrine. They fancied they saw the expediency of thus repressing error, and supporting the cause of what they regarded as true religion. And like Judas they resolved to act on their own views, instead of humbly resorting for guidance to the precepts and example of Christ.....”

I think *Whately* demonstrates, amongst many other things, that there remain potent spiritual and moral lessons to be drawn from each one of the various different views of Judas.

## **Second Postscript**

I promised that we would return to the Gospel of Judas that I mentioned at the start. We knew that it existed, because of mentions by the Early Church Fathers, but it wasn't until 2006 that a previously discovered badly damaged and fragmented papyrus was identified as containing parts of the long lost Gospel of Judas. Scholars remain divided over the interpretation of the text, for example whether it claims that Judas was sent to betray Jesus, or whether a truer translation of the ancient Coptic language is that he was sent merely to “hand him over.” (cf *The Amplified Bible* alternative translations of John 13:21 reproduced earlier).

Newspapers, however, laid aside such subtleties, with even broadsheets like *The Guardian* claiming: “..... Judas Iscariot's side of the story was finally published yesterday. Thanks to a newly discovered gospel in Judas's name, we now know what his excuse was: Jesus made me do it.....”

“According to the 26-page gospel..... Jesus told Judas: "Step away from the others and I shall tell you the mysteries of the kingdom.”

“In the days before the fateful Passover holiday, Jesus also told Judas: "You will exceed all of them. For you will sacrifice the man that clothes me." The line, according to biblical scholars, suggests that Jesus chose Judas to help him achieve his destiny by liberating him from his earthly body.”

Of course this Gnostic gospel is outside the canonical literature, but how fascinating to see where it resonates with some of the theories above (all expounded of course long before its discovery) – especially with the popularised Whately idea that Judas viewed himself as intellectually superior to the other apostles.

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Thank you dear reader if you have read thus far.

For more still, and if you can cope with the Victorian language (and typeface) you can read all of Whately's 1851 book of sermons online at Google Books (URL too long to capture here – just google the title)

You can read the Guardian “write up” of the Gospel of Judas on April 7<sup>th</sup> 2006 at:  
<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2006/apr/07/comment.frontpagenews>

## Prayers

### PRAYER FOR MEDICAL WORKERS

Lord Jesus, in your earthly ministry  
you healed sick bodies  
and brought health to troubled minds.

Bless, we pray, all who are continuing your work,  
in clinics and hospitals, here and throughout the world.

Give inspiration to those researching  
new ways to combat disease.

Give patience and sympathy to doctors and health visitors  
as they listen to patients and advise them.

Give endurance and compassion to nurses and to all  
who care for the sick and who follow in your steps,  
our Healer and Redeemer.

## A PRAYER IN THE TIME OF THE CORONAVIRUS

Almighty and All-loving God,  
we pray to you through Christ the Healer  
for those who suffer from the  
Coronavirus Covid-19  
in our land and across the world.

We pray too for all who reach out to  
those who mourn the loss  
of each and every person who has  
died as a result of contracting the disease.

Give wisdom to policymakers,  
skill to healthcare professionals and researchers,  
comfort to everyone in distress  
and a sense of calm to us all in these  
days of uncertainty and distress.

This we ask in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord  
who showed compassion to the outcast,  
acceptance to the rejected  
and love to those to whom no love was shown.

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Lord, bless those we love, our families and friends:  
keep them safe from danger,  
and guard them with your peace.

We pray for those beyond the circle of our lives and the circle of our church,  
for those who sorrow, those we are trouble,  
for those who suffer war, cruelty, injustice or neglect.  
In their weakness may they share your strength,  
and in their despair find hope.

## EVENING PRAYER

God our Creator,  
by your mercy and might  
the world turns safely into darkness  
and returns again to light.

We give into your hands  
our unfinished tasks,  
our unsolved problems,  
and our unfulfilled hopes,  
knowing that only those things  
which you bless will prosper.

To your love and protection  
we commit one another  
and all for whom we have prayed;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

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God bless you everyone.

The Jewish people have a valedictory greeting: "Next year in Jerusalem."

Let's look forward to our next Holy Week, face-to-face, "Next year at Fareham."

Stephen