

Betrayals and Surrenders
Hallow “Pray 40;” 22 March 2024
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Hello and welcome back to Hallow’s Pray40 Challenge. My name is Sr. Miriam James Heidland, and it is such a gift to walk this journey with you. Today, I’d like to invite you to join me as we look more closely at two very different stories of surrender in Scripture: Judas and his surrender to despair... and Peter and his surrender to God’s mercy. So, let’s take a moment now to let our hearts and minds settle. Take a deep breath in...and breathe all the way out... Once more: a deep breath in...and breathe all the way out...

And if you’re able, and if it feels safe enough for you, I’m just going to ask you to close your eyes, just for a moment... And allow yourself to let the worries of this day fall away; let your body relax; and just settle in wherever you find yourself. Just allow yourself to come into the peace and presence of God, who is with us now... (Silence)

We’ll begin in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

So, let’s start with Judas Iscariot. Most of us are probably familiar with the basic details of his life—at least what little of it that we can glean from Scripture. Judas was one of Christ’s chosen apostles and by most accounts was in charge of managing the money that supported Jesus’ ministry.

Of course, he’s most well known for his betrayal of Jesus on the evening of the Last Supper—which we’ll get to in a moment. Before that, however, there are other instances where Judas seems to grow disillusioned with Christ and his mission. When the woman anoints Jesus’ feet with expensive oil, it’s Judas who bemoans the waste of such an expensive gift—money, he argues, that could have gone to the poor. John is quick to state in his Gospel, however, that Judas had no real concern for the poor, caring instead to line his own pockets with the funds that had been entrusted to him. Whatever the source of his discontent and disillusionment with our Lord, Judas arrived to the Last Supper with betrayal already firmly planted in his heart. Did he go through the motions of that final meal while daydreaming about how he’d spend his traitor’s reward? You likely know what happens a few hours later: Judas leads the soldiers to Christ in the garden. Judas betrays Jesus with a kiss, and our Lord, his voice perhaps tinged with sorrow, calls him “friend.”

It’s difficult to fully imagine what Judas might have felt in the aftermath of his traitorous embrace. Perhaps he never thought that things would go quite as far as they did—perhaps he had assumed that Jesus would be arrested and chastised and then let go. Perhaps he really thought that no lasting harm would come from his actions. How many of us have been led to sin by a similar path? We tell ourselves: What I’m doing isn’t so bad. This one decision won’t really hurt anyone. Just this one sin, this one time, and then I’ll get back on track. Or, equally as likely, perhaps Judas did know the full consequences of his betrayal that night; knew that he was

handing our Lord over to be humiliated, tortured, and brutally killed. But of course, agreeing to a deal in the abstract and seeing those consequences played out in real life are two very different things. It would seem that Judas, happy as he was to take the silver pieces in exchange for Christ's life, was abruptly faced with the reality of his decision. The man he had called Rabbi. Savior. Lord. Dragged away in the dead of night. Treated like a common criminal. Condemned to die a torturous, terrible death. Perhaps seeing the events unfold in real time drove home for Judas the irrevocable, terrible price of his decision.

Let's take a moment now to imagine Judas early on the morning of Good Friday, watching from the crowd as the chief priests handed Christ over to Pilate to be crucified. It's in this moment that Matthew tells us that Judas was overcome with remorse. Friends, who among us hasn't made a decision we later felt shame about? If you're able to, imagine that wave of guilt that swept over Judas. The sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach. The way his mouth turned dry and chest tightened with despair. Those thirty pieces of silver he carried—no longer a handsome reward. The clang of the coins as he walked a constant condemnation.

How deep his despair must have gone. We've all been there—we've all stood where Judas stood in the aftermath of a terrible, hurtful, sinful choice. We all know the dreadful desire to change what has already been decided. It's no wonder that Judas tosses the bag of coins at the feet of the chief priests in a desperate attempt to undo what could not be undone. Judas isn't the only apostle struck by regret in those early morning hours.

Elsewhere in the crowd, we know that Peter, once so boastful in his loyalty to Christ, finds himself denying Jesus again.

And again.

And again.

The bravado he'd shown in the weeks and months leading up to Christ's Passion were nowhere to be found when Jesus was marched before the chief priests and condemned. Just as Christ had predicted, when faced with the reality of being arrested and executed, Peter's courage fails him.

When the rooster crows at sunrise on Friday morning, Peter meets the gaze of our Lord across the courtyard and is overcome with shame. Shame in his cowardice, in his human sinfulness and weakness, in his denial of the one he professed to serve. Luke describes the look shared between Christ and Peter in that moment using the Greek word 'emblepo'; to look with love, or to look to someone's heart. Imagine how tender and piercing that gaze must have been—the gaze of a savior who understands the full extent of his beloved apostle's weakness and brokenness. Perhaps take a moment and imagine Christ turning that same gaze on you, a look that communicates both deep sorrow and boundless mercy in the face of your sins and shortcomings.

Friends, these two men offer us a sharp contrast in how they respond to the surge of remorse and regret that strikes their hearts on the morning of our Lord's crucifixion. Both are stories of surrender, in their own way.

For Judas, his story becomes one of despair. A surrender to self-hatred. A surrender to the belief that he was beyond the reach of God's mercy. A surrender to the spiral of shame and disgrace.

I want to pause here for a moment to just hold space for you if you have ever been in this state of despair. If you have a loved one who has been full of the kind of self-hatred and shame that Judas felt; if you find yourself there even now, caught in that spiral. And I just want to speak directly to your heart right now, to reach out to whatever part of you believes that you are outside the reach of God's mercy or love.

Because, my friend, we know that that is always a lie. I am convinced of God's deep love for you, no matter what mistakes you've made. No matter what shame or sin tries to convince you otherwise. There is no darkness so dark that God won't find you even there. There is no sin too deep, no mistake too far gone that God won't lavish His love and mercy on you the moment you're ready to receive it. Even Judas was not beyond the reach of God's mercy. You, no matter what story you've come to believe about yourself, you are not and never will be beyond the reach of God's mercy.

God has a different story to offer you, if you'll let Him. He desires to give you a different ending than the one that self-hatred and despair want to sell to you. Consider Peter, also filled with shame and regret. But his story becomes a story of redemption because he chooses to surrender not to his own despair, but to Christ's mercy.

We spoke earlier about the desire to undo our worst choices, to rewind time so that we could choose again and choose better. We have no power to undo those choices, but God in His mercy so often redeems even our worst mistakes when we surrender to Him.

And so Peter humbly submits to Christ's mercy, setting aside his pride, moving past the shame that might have kept him trapped in that sin forever. Christ responds by offering Peter a sort of do-over in the days after his Resurrection. With tenderness, love, and compassion, Christ asks Peter the same question three times: "Do you love me?"

And there on the seashore, Peter affirms three times: "Yes, Lord, I love you."

"I love you."

"I love you."

Do you hear in this story the echo of Peter's betrayal, the reversal of his three denials of Christ? What a loving Savior we serve. What an opportunity Jesus extends to Peter, to meet his sin with this invitation to try again. This invitation to redemption. Friends, the salvation that Jesus brings to us is personal. He longs to redeem us not just in the general sense, but in the specifics of our

individual stories. He redeems Peter in a way that speaks to the intimate details of Peter's own need for salvation, for healing. And he redeems each of us with that same level of intimacy, with that same care and concern for the details of our woundedness and sinfulness.

He gives Peter a path forward, into a new story. And he offers that to you too, today, right now: an invitation into a new story, a path forward out of whatever sin or brokenness threatens to hold you back from that love that God has to give to you. I just want to invite you now to spend some time, and just ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you, what does He want you to know from our time together today in prayer? And feel free to press pause if you need more time here with God. You just take your time and see whatever the Lord wants you to know right now. How does He want to speak to you in this moment?

So, as we close our time together and return to the space that we're in, let us thank God for opening our hearts up to Him, for loving us so perfectly even in our sinfulness. Thank you, Lord, for gazing on us with tenderness and mercy... for showing us a path out of despair...for redeeming us so intimately and personally.

Lord, we thank you for your mercy... Lord, we thank you for the compassion you show us when we fall short... We thank you Lord, and we praise you. And we ask all this, in your holy name, Jesus. Amen.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.