

The Journey of Transformation Raymond L. Fox

Something to reflect on, comment on, and even practice on your journey.



The Message Judas Missed

Judas Iscariot, the apostle of Jesus who sold him for thirty pieces of silver, has come to personify the deepest forms of hypocrisy and treachery. He provides us the consolation of thinking that “my sins are certainly not as bad as the sins of some people.” But honestly, the same fundamental force that drove Judas drives all of us at some time or another and perhaps even now.

He was one of the twelve who witnessed all the miracles of Jesus and listened intently to his teachings so Jesus could send them out to proclaim the good news of the kingdom. Another apostle, John, reported a scene during the last week of Jesus’ life to prepare us to understand what motivated Judas’ later betrayal (John 12:1-6). When they all came for dinner together with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus to honor Jesus for raising Lazarus from the dead, Mary anointed the head and feet of Jesus with very expensive perfume. Judas immediately protested her loving gesture by claiming they could have sold the perfume and given the proceeds to the poor.

In his narrative, John explains that Judas was so anxious about selling the perfume because he was responsible for the bag of money that contained the apostles’ resources for their day-to-day expenses. John says that Judas did not care for the poor but was a thief and took money for himself from the bag. Judas was selfish. He was providing for his own needs without thinking about how his decisions and behavior would harm others. Selfishness fuels dishonesty and greed and has a nearly endless variety of other manifestations.

We wonder if, when John was writing about this scene many years after it happened, he remembered what he was like during those three and a half years he spent with Judas while they traveled with Jesus. There was an occasion when John and his brother James had wanted to burn a Samaritan village to the ground because the Samaritans offended their pride. The two brothers also claimed they deserved to occupy the most important

positions in the kingdom because they believed they were the greatest among the twelve. Such arrogance was also a sign of their surrender to selfishness and a betrayal of the unconditional love that Jesus was teaching.

Then, a few days after the scene with Mary, when the apostles gathered for the Passover meal with Jesus, they began to argue, as they had done before, about who was the greatest among them. John must have won the argument because he sat at the table on the right side of Jesus. Judas must have come in second place because he was on the left side of Jesus. Of course, they all really lost when Jesus walked into the room and smelled their arrogance in the air. Did John remember this when he was writing about Judas?

What happened to Judas? Like all selfish people, he devised a plan that he thought would work so that everything would turn out well for his own benefit. He knew how he could replace the funds in the bag. He would negotiate with the chief priests who wanted to kill Jesus, telling them where to find Jesus away from the crowds in exchange for money. Judas had witnessed the incomparable power of Jesus and had seen him escape the hands of the religious authorities several times. He must have been certain his plan would work, and Jesus would escape again; but when he saw Jesus being led away to be condemned, his egocentric world came crashing down and crushed his spirit. He returned to the high priests and flung the thirty pieces of silver back at them, declaring, “I have betrayed the blood of an innocent man,” no doubt hoping against hope they would release Jesus.

He was like the lost son in Jesus’ parable who suddenly came to his senses and Peter when he realized he had denied Jesus three times. The difference was that he killed himself because of immediate, overwhelming despair. What was the message he missed by ending his life so quickly? That Jesus is truly full of grace—the practice of mercy even when mercy is not deserved.

John probably did remember what he was like. In contrast to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, he is the only writer who gives this explanation of Judas’ motives. Looking back on those events, he knew how powerful selfishness had been in his life. He also understood how deeply his spiritual life depended on the patience and forgiveness of Jesus’ grace. With a humbly grateful heart, he referred to himself in his narrative as, “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 21:7). Jesus loved Judas too, but the tragedy of his life was that he did not give himself the chance to discover the depth of this love.

About Raymond

Raymond L. Fox has been teaching about transformation in the image of Jesus for forty-five years, in the U.S. and abroad. He has written two books, *Fruit of the Spirit* and *Love Your Neighbor as Yourself*. His work also includes character counseling and mentoring in juvenile detention facilities. He has degrees in philosophy and education.



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