

Acts 1:18-19

Easter 7B Midweek + May 16, 2018
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho
Pastor Tim Pauls
The Second Death on Good Friday

The Word of the Lord from Acts 1:18-19: "Now this man [Judas] acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood." This is the Word of the Lord.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Two deaths are recorded in Scripture on Good Friday around Jerusalem, two men who knew each other well– Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews; and Judas, His betrayer. They share more than a death date and a final meal, though. Both die hanged on trees– Jesus hanged by nails in crucifixion, Judas by a rope in suicide. Therefore, both share the same condemnation under the Law of Deuteronomy 21:22-23, "And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God."

Strange as it will always sound to our ears, the Gospel is that Jesus is cursed by God on the cross. He is condemned for our sin, forsaken by God in our place so that we might be redeemed. It's there that Jesus dies for the sins of the world, that whoever believes in Him may not perish but have eternal life.

Judas doesn't believe. We know from Matthew 27 that he quickly regrets betraying Jesus. He takes the thirty pieces of silver back to the priests and says, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." Ponder that for a second: Judas realizes his sin, and he goes to confess it to his clergy. But they have no absolution: rather than proclaim any sort of pardon, their response is terribly cold. They say, "What is that to us? See to it yourself."

In other words, we're done with you because we've no more use for you, and you're on your own. Looks like it's you against God. See to it yourself.

So Judas throws the silver into the temple, then goes and sees to it himself. If there is no forgiveness and you've betrayed God, then what is left for you? Only death, because the wages of sin is death.

There's a little bit more to the story of Judas. He buys the Potter's Field, says Matthew 27, though indirectly. Actually, the chief priests buy it with the thirty pieces of silver he's flung back at them. They need a potter's field, a place to bury strangers, notorious criminals, etc.– they need a place to bury bodies of the dead whom no one will claim as family or friend. This is the resting place of Judas.

How he gets to his final resting place is a bit of a discussion. Acts tells us that he falls headlong into the field, so it's a pretty common assumption that he hangs himself on a tree in that very field, and the rope breaks. I would suggest another option: I'm guessing, but I don't think it's out of bounds. I'd offer it's possible that he's found hanged by someone somewhere else, and cut down in keeping with the law. What to do with the body of the betrayer? Carry it to the Potter's Field and throw it down there. Thus Judas falls headlong, his blood soaking the dirt; and when we last hear of him there, his corrupted body lies unburied in the field of blood.

Why reflect on this? Because in the Scriptures, a body left unburied is a sign of utter defeat. When slain soldiers are left unburied in battle, it is a sign that their side has been so soundly defeated that there is no one left to give them honors. Furthermore, a body left unburied is a sign of being cursed and forsaken, so much so that no one will come near to do the burial. It is how unbelievers are portrayed on the Last Day in Ezekiel 39:17-21 and Revelation 19:17-21, for they are dead in their sin and outside the kingdom of God.

That is the end of Judas. Stained with sin and unable to cleanse himself, he dies defeated as one cursed with sin and forsaken by all. His final resting spot is among the stranger, the forgotten and the notorious. Worst of all, as one unforgiven he dies a stranger to God, outside of His kingdom forever.

Mark and consider: that's the end of all apart from Christ. If you're apart from Christ, you sin. You're sorry, but that doesn't save. You want the sin gone, and apart from Christ there is only one solution: you've got to see to it yourself. It makes sense, but this is the devil at work, to make you believe that cleansing yourself is up to you. He'd have you die in one of two ways: he'd have you be like the chief priests and elders, believing that you *can* make up for your sin. Or he'd have you die like Judas, hopeless because you can't.

Either way, the devil wants you believing that you must see to your sin yourself. If you see to it yourself, you're condemned – even if you've eaten with Jesus and given Him a kiss of greeting on the cheek.

If it is left to you, you have no hope. You can't get rid of your sin. In that case, what's left for you is the death of Judas– to die under sin's curse, and to be lost as one unknown by God.

That would be your end...but remember that two men die on Good Friday. The other is innocent of the charges against Him– He's innocent of all sin, for this is the Son of God who is nailed to that cross. And *hanged* on that cross, He *is cursed by God*. God the Father condemns His Son for the sins of the world. He forsakes His Son as the one guilty of all sin. Forsaken by His Father, Jesus suffers the death and hell that sinners deserve.

But that is not His end. He is reconciled with His Father, commending His spirit to Him before He dies. He is not thrown down forsaken on the Field of Blood: He is taken down from the cross by His followers, who tenderly wrap His body in linen and place it in a tomb for an honorable burial. He is laid in the grave, but He does not see corruption. Instead, He sanctifies your grave so that it is not your end, either: because He sees to all things for you, your grave is now a resting-place before your body is awakened for eternal life. He descends into hell to proclaim His victory. And then He rises from the dead three days later. He lives and reigns for eternity, and He does so for you.

Seeing to your sin yourself couldn't save you, so Jesus has seen to your redemption.

The death of Judas is not for you. For Jesus' sake, you do not die a stranger outside of God's grace and promise. The death of Jesus is yours: you know this because He has said so with the words, "I baptize you." By water and the Word He said, "*I know you* and I will not forget you. My death is your death and My resurrection is your resurrection. You're no stranger, but a beloved child."

Those whom He knows, He feeds with His own body and blood– for the forgiveness of sins. The same body crucified, the same blood shed. The same Jesus risen, for you.

And the risen Savior will not keep silent, but continues to speak His Word to you. There is no greater comfort to the sinner than this: Christ's absolution is not, "See to it yourself;" but "I forgive you all of your sins."

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