

Sermon for Sunday, November 7, 1976, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Senior Pastor
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"TRAITOR IN THE GRAY FLANNEL SUIT"

Mark 14:12-21

Text: "...Jesus said.. 'One of you will betray me'... They began to be sorrowful, and to say to him one after another, 'Is it I?'" St. Mark 14:18, 19

A tragedy had struck the little band of men who followed Jesus. In their midst was a traitor. Jesus had said, "One of you shall betray me.." The disciples must have begun to look at one another with sudden suspicion and doubt. Half fearfully they said to him one by one, "Lord, is it I?"

Everything had been going so well for them. This had been the week of the triumphant entry into Jerusalem. It must have seemed like a dream to them to have received such a joyous welcome by the city. Over the past three years they had endured so much--there had been rejection, hardship, privation. Many times they must have wondered if they had been right about him when Peter had said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." But now the fellowship that had been knit together by shared experiences suddenly threatened to come apart at the seams, "for one of you shall betray me."

There was one at the table with Jesus that night who didn't have to ask, "Lord, is it I?" No, he already knew. And when he did whisper that fateful question, he must have done so just to be sure that Jesus really knew. So, when he asked and the answer came back, "you have said," Judas' heart must have jumped in his breast--yes, Jesus knew.

What do you think brought Judas to this fateful moment? What needs did he have, what compulsions were his, what motivations drove him to the point that in order to meet his own needs he had betrayed Jesus? How could a man have lived in the fellowship of the disciples, walked in the presence of the very Son of God, listened to his teachings, watched his miracles, seen his healings--how could he go out into the dark night to betray him? It really is incredible, is it not? And because it is so incredible, men have sought to explain why Judas did what he did. Some say he was trying to force the hand of Jesus, others say he was trying to make the people rally around Jesus, some say he was trying to force the priests to come to some decisions about Jesus.

Why do you think Judas betrayed Jesus? I suppose the best clue comes from the Bible itself. Surely those who knew Judas best could provide the best evidence as to why Judas betrayed Jesus. Well, the Bible tells us that Judas was a lover of money. We are told he resented it when some expensive ointment was used to anoint Jesus. We are told that "he was a thief, and as he had the moneybox he used to take what was put into it." (St. John 12:6)

Do you think Judas really loved Jesus? I do. I believe Judas loved Jesus very deeply. If he didn't, how can you explain his stubborn discipleship over those three hard, difficult years? If he didn't, how can you understand his suicide? He had to be overwhelmed by remorse and regret and grief to do that. Yes, I believe Judas really loved Jesus. The problem was, you see, Judas didn't love Jesus only. He loved something else--he loved money, too.

And doesn't that bring sharply into focus something Jesus once said? He said, "No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

Do you have the same problem Judas had? I do. Like Judas I discover there are some secret loves in my life. I suspect it is true of all of us this morning. We have passions of the soul that get out of control and we find ourselves doing things that are shameful and sinful. Do you ever find yourself cutting some moral corner? Do you find yourself pushing Jesus into the background because there is some more pressing thing in your life at the moment? Do you find pride--or greed--or envy--or selfishness controlling your life? And it isn't because we don't love Jesus. No, it is because we don't love Jesus only. We love him but we also love money--or things--or prestige--or self. So, like Judas, we find ourselves denying Jesus. As the Lord put it, "no man can serve two masters."

But notice what happened to Judas! He became a traitor. Do you suppose that ancient traitor in his flowing robe of the mid-East is any different from the traitor in a gray flannel suit? Notice first that Judas betrayed himself. Judas denied himself two great blessings. The first blessing is the spiritual blessing of giving. Do you remember how Jesus put it? He said, "it is more blessed to give than to receive." Yes, Jesus says there is a spiritual blessing in giving. Do you remember the little story in the Bible about the widow who cast her last cent into the temple treasure? Why do you think she put her last penny in the temple offering? Could it not be because in spite of her poverty and physical need she recognized that man does not live by bread alone? Could it not be because she also knew she needed spiritual blessings as well? Yes, Jesus put it this way in the sermon on the mount, "life is more than food and the body more than clothing." The man who is unable to give and who never experiences the blessings of giving is poor indeed. He betrays himself and denies to himself the blessings of God.

But there is a second way in which Judas denied himself a blessing and thereby betrayed himself. You see, Jesus also said, "Give, and it shall be given to you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together and running over." That's a promise of God. If you give, he will bless you. In the long run you will have more than ever. As a matter of fact, that is part of the promise in our budget brochure you got this week. In Malachi, God says to put him to the test--if we bring our full tithes, he will open the windows of heaven and pour down for us an overflowing blessing. There are some of you who can testify that as you have given, God has blessed and prospered you. Maybe you are familiar with the Shony Boy Restaurants. The man who started that chain is a Presbyterian. From the beginning he tithed everything he made. However, as his business prospered, the amount of his tithe became quite large and he went to his pastor. "Pastor," he said, "the amount of my tithe is so large now that I am concerned about giving that much money. Does the Bible have anything to say about that?" "Oh," said his pastor, "indeed it does. Listen, don't you worry about this matter at all. I will take care of it myself. Tonight I will begin to pray and I'll tell the Lord he has blessed you so much that your tithe is now too much to give to him. I'll ask him to reduce your profits and income until you can afford to tithe again." "Pastor, please don't do that," said the man. "I understand perfectly and I'll keep giving my tithe." Yes, God had richly blessed him. You just can't outgive God and I've never known anyone who gave to the Lord who wasn't richer for it. John Bunyan put it this way, "A man there was, and they called him mad; the more he gave, the more he had." Don't betray yourself out of a two-fold blessing--the spiritual blessing of giving and the material blessing of those who simply cannot outgive God.

So, Judas betrayed himself. Notice in the second place that Judas also betrayed his fellow disciples. The twelve had become a close-knit group over the three years of their discipleship. Through all of the hardships and privations, and in the good times and the exciting times, they had developed a wonderful fellowship, a love and trust. Now, suddenly, into this fellowship came this explosive charge, "one of you shall betray me." In days past they had counted on one another to do his share,

carry his load, bear his responsibility. And now a traitor was in their midst who was to set off the catastrophic events that ended on Calvary. And when the disciples came to watch the crucifixion from afar with tears streaming down their faces they were men who had been betrayed by a fellow disciple.

Are there any traitors in gray flannel suits among us this morning? Are you carrying your full load in the fellowship of Central? Are you doing your share of teaching--or committee work--or serving--and are you giving your fair share, giving as God has prospered you? If not, are we not betraying the fellowship? If I fail to do my part, then someone else has to pick up my share of the load. If I fail to give my part then someone else has to give it for me or else the work goes undone.

When we join the church, one of the questions we are asked is this: "Do you promise to support the church in its worship and work to the best of your ability?" Are you keeping that promise? Are you supporting the work of the church the best you can? If not, are you betraying anybody?

We have approximately 2,100 members at Central. Our giving is about \$250 per member. Assuming there are about three persons on an average in each household, that means \$750 per family. Do you think the income of this congregation averages \$7,500? If we are all tithing, we are all eligible for food stamps! Many of you do give sacrificially, but often your giving has to make up for those who fail the fellowship because they don't give adequately.

To betray yourself is bad, to betray your friends is worse still, but in the third place, the most evil thing Judas did was to betray Jesus. At the end Judas went back and tried to undo what he had done, but it was too late. In bitter remorse he went and hanged himself.

Does God want our money when we can afford it--if there ever is such a time? Or does he want us to give now and trust him? Does God want us to be more faithful with our house note, our car note, our bank note than him? Listen, do you think Uncle Sam is content for us to show him our patriotism and loyalty by singing, "My Country, 'Tis of Thee"? No, Uncle Sam says, "What is your income? Give me a percentage of that." Does a lusty singing of "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow," satisfy God? No, he says, "Bring the full tithe..."

In one place the Bible says of Jesus, "And he sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the multitude putting money into the treasury." (Mark 12:41) Maybe sitting "opposite the treasury" is the rightful place for Jesus. This man who died for us, who redeemed us, who saves us, has a right to be at our elbow when we write our checks, when we open our pay envelopes, when we invest our money, when we pay our bills. He has a right to watch us for he has bought us for a price and we are his. I suspect he is the only one with such a right--the right to take his place over against the treasury and watch what you and I do with our money.

Yes, Judas the traitor--he betrayed himself, he betrayed his fellow disciples, he betrayed Jesus. And whether it's a long, flowing robe or a gray flannel suit, it adds up the same at the bottom line. That day Jesus said, "One of you will betray me." And they began to be sorrowful, and to say to him one by one, "Is it I?" Judas said, "Is it I?" and Jesus replied, "Thou hast said." If you ask that question, what will Jesus say?