

Sermon for Sunday, March 9, 1980, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D. Pastor
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""SUCCESSOR TO JUDAS"

Acts 1:15-26

Text: "And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was enrolled with the eleven apostles." Acts 1:26

One of the most fascinating stories in the Bible to my way of thinking is the one recorded in our scripture for this morning. The apostles are in a sort of hiatus, an in-between time. There has been a break in the action. They have gone through the incredible excitement and thrill of being with the resurrected Lord and he has told them to wait in Jerusalem because something very special is going to happen! They are going to receive the very power of God himself! They are going to be filled with the Holy Spirit. And when that happens, they are to begin a world-wide campaign to witness to the saving power of God in Jesus.

Well, it has been tremendously exciting to meet the resurrected Saviour after going through the trauma of the crucifixion when they had thought that all was ~~lost~~. And they are looking forward to whatever is going to happen next because whatever it is, they anticipate that it is going to be exciting. But in the time between, things have settled down. Peter decides that it is time to replace the lost Judas. The apostles have been reduced to eleven and Peter decides that they should restore the apostles to the original number. So everybody decides to elect a successor to Judas.

This morning I want to talk about that successor. In doing so, there are two things that I want to hold in tension with each other. That means that you will need to help me, because I need to get the first one up in the air and you will need to hold it there until I can get the other one up beside it! Let me give you the first one so you can start juggling it.

The first question I would like for us to deal with is the qualifications necessary for a successor to Judas. Now, as nearly as I can determine from our Bible reading this morning, there are three basic requirements. The first requirement for the successor to Judas is that he must know about Jesus. Peter says that the successor is to be "one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us--".

That is to say, this person is required to have known about the ministry of Jesus-- about his teachings, about who he is as the Son of God, about his death on the cross as he died for the sins of the world. Yes, this successor must understand about Jesus--who he was, what he taught, what he did. Let me ask you, could you be a successor to Judas at this point? I suspect most of us would be eligible to some extent. We may not know everything the Bible teaches about Jesus, but we would be reasonably well qualified. Basically you and I know about the life, the teachings and the death of Jesus.

But the second qualification for the successor to Judas is that he be able to witness to a living Lord. Do you remember how Peter put it? He said the successor must "become with us a witness to his resurrection." Now, that means simply that this person who follows Judas must have experienced Jesus as a living saviour. Let me ask you this question: could you meet the second qualification? Well, I suspect many of us here this morning could. Many of us have invited Jesus into our lives and have had an experience of God. We have known what it is to know a living saviour in our lives. And even if some of us may not have had such an experience, at least we believe that Jesus is alive and that we can have an experience with a living Lord. We may not have invited Jesus into our lives yet,

but we know people who have and we have seen the dramatic change in their lives, so we know that Jesus is a resurrected, living Saviour.

However, the third qualification for the successor to Judas is revealed in the prayer that they made when they got ready to select the person. Do you remember their prayer? They prayed, "Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show which one of these two thou has chosen.." Well, there it is: a heart which is pure before God. Yes, the successor to Judas must be a person that when God looks on his heart, God knows his heart is pure. Well, how about that third qualification? Does that one fit you? If God looked on your heart this morning would he chose you to succeed Judas because your heart was pure?

I suspect most of us would fail test three--I know I would. There is still so much in my heart that I haven't surrendered to God. There is still so much in my life that I haven't brought under the control of Jesus that I would be disqualified. Is that true for you? Do you discover that in spite of what you know about Jesus, about his teachings, about what he wants you to do and be; and in spite of the fact that you know him as your personal living Saviour, there is still so much of sin in your heart that you would be disqualified as a successor to Judas?

This brings me to the second thing that I want to talk about this morning. For our thinking together, I'd like to raise the question, why did Judas fail in the first place? What went wrong that it was ever necessary to elect a replacement? If we took the three qualifications necessary for Judas' successor and measured them against Judas himself, what would we discover?

Well, first of all, we would discover that Judas did know about Jesus. He at least had been with him from the beginning up until the time of the betrayal. He had heard his teachings, he had listened as Jesus explained what God wanted from us. He knew that Jesus was the Son of God for he had been there that day when Peter had cried out, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Second, we would discover that Judas had a personal relationship to Jesus. Not in the same sense that the disciples were to have after the crucifixion and resurrect but still Judas knew what it was to have Jesus walk beside him every day. He knew what it was to feel the touch of his hand, to see the look of love and compassion in his eyes. Yes, Judas knew what it was to walk with Jesus.

But what about the third qualification? Did he have a pure heart--did he have a heart that God could look into and find no sin? Well, that's where the breakdown came, wasn't it? Do you remember how in one place the Bible says of Judas that he was a thief? (John 12:6) That means there was some desire in the heart of Judas that he had not surrendered to God. And that desire grew and grew until it so possessed him that he finally betrayed Jesus for a handful of precious silver.

The heart is the place where the breakdown always comes, isn't it? Recently, in a sermon I mentioned a man in the Bible named Demas. Demas was a disciple who traveled for a while with St. Paul. He was a fellow-worker, he was involved in evangelism with Paul. In a number of his letters, St. Paul included the name of Demas when he sent greetings to other churches. Yet, in the end, he writes to young Timothy, "Do your best to come to me soon. For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me..."(II Timothy 4:9,10)

Do you see how it works? We can know about Jesus--about his teachings, about what God wants us to be, about how Jesus died for us; and we can know him even as our personal saviour. But if our hearts are not pure, there is that terrible risk we run. Like Demas--or like Judas--we may find ourselves deserting because we love the present world, or because we have sold our Lord for a handful of silver.

There are a couple of things I'd like for you to notice about Judas. First, Judas never really turned his back on the world. He never really turned his back on the evil things in his heart. Yes, Judas knew he needed a saviour and for a while he walked with Jesus. As a matter of fact, for three years he was in the constant companionship of the Lord. Yet, at the end those hidden things in his heart--things he never let Jesus have, never let Jesus deal with--those things at last overpowered him. It was then that he turned away from Jesus.

Would it be unfair to ask you what is in your heart this morning? I know there are many of you here this morning who understand how Jesus wants you to live and I know many of you have come to know Jesus as your living saviour. But down deep, down in the depths of your inner being where it really counts, are you letting Jesus deal with what's in your heart? For example, take this thing of lust. Are you hiding that from Jesus or are you letting him deal with it? Or take the greed for money and success. Is that out in the open between you and the Lord or are you hiding something. There are so many bad emotions in the lives of all of us this morning. There is hate towards certain people, or resentfulness or malice. There is so often no kindness in our hearts, no forgiveness. We are too often possessed by selfishness and self-centeredness. Are we hiding those feelings in our inner being from Jesus? Are we shutting him out and not letting him into that area of our lives? That's what Judas did. And in the end, because of it, he ended up betraying the Lord and selling him out. Could that happen to us? Oh, we both know it could.

The second thing I would call to your attention about Judas is this: he tried to take his life-style; he tried to take who and what he was and force Jesus into that mold. He wanted Jesus to approve of him and his life-style without making any basic changes. But wasn't that just backwards? We can't make God what we want him to be in our lives. No, we have to take our lives and put them at His disposal and let him make us into what he wants us to be.

Does that make sense to you? Do you make decisions about big things in your life (or even little things, for that matter) and then ask God to bless them? We say, "Lord, I'm going to do this or that and I ask you to bless it." We say, "Lord, I have this or that problem and I ask you do something about it that will make me happy again." That's what Judas did. According to the best information we have, Judas had a dream about Israel. He thought Jesus had come to stir up the people and to lead them against Rome. He thought his homeland would be great again as it had been in the days of David. And apparently he thought he would force the hand of Jesus--make him declare himself--and lead the people. But that didn't happen. You see, he took his plans and tried to force God into them and it just wouldn't work.

I don't know about you, but I'm always doing that--I'm always doing something and then trying to force God into it or get his blessing. But do you know what God wants? He wants us to surrender our lives to him and then make them pliable in his hands. The other eleven finally did that and God used them to turn the world up-side down. But Judas didn't--he tried to force God into his mold and instead destroyed himself.

So, there are those two things about Judas. He had a dirty heart that he hid from Jesus and wouldn't let him deal with and he tried to use God for his ends rather than letting God use him for God's ends.

Well, Judas is gone. The time has come to elect a successor. That person must know about Jesus--his teachings, what he did for us. He must know him as his personal, living saviour. Most of all he must be one that when God looks on his heart, nothing is being hidden and kept back, but his heart is open to let God deal with all that's there. He must be one who isn't trying to use God, but is bent on letting God use him in whatever way God wills.

Now, this last word. Every one of you here this morning is a Judas. We have all-- in one way or another--failed to be a faithful disciple and we have let Jesus down. All of us are guilty in greater or lesser degree of betrayal. This morning God calls you and me to be successors to Judas--the successor to the Judas in our own hearts. It isn't enough to know about Jesus. It isn't enough to know him as living Saviour. If we are not to betray him over and over we must also let him into the dark places of our hearts where betrayal lurks.

Will you let Jesus into your heart--into all its hidden places--right now? Will you let him deal with the Judas in you? Then, you see, you can be the successor to yourself.