

## May 12, 2024 Sermon Manuscript



### Acts 1:1-11 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach <sup>2</sup> until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. <sup>3</sup> After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God\*. <sup>4</sup> On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. <sup>5</sup> For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

<sup>6</sup> Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

<sup>7</sup> He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

<sup>9</sup> After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

<sup>10</sup> They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. <sup>11</sup> “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

*\* Or God’s Empire (as translated by Scot McKnight)*

### Acts 1:12-26 (NIV)

<sup>12</sup> Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day’s walk from the city. <sup>13</sup> When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying.

Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. <sup>14</sup> They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

<sup>15</sup> In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) <sup>16</sup> and said, “Brothers and sisters, the Scripture had to be fulfilled in which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus. <sup>17</sup> He was one of our number and shared in our ministry.”

<sup>18</sup> (With the payment he received for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. <sup>19</sup> Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)

<sup>20</sup> “For,” said Peter, “it is written in the Book of Psalms:

“May his place be deserted;

let there be no one to dwell in it,”

and,

“May another take his place of leadership.”

<sup>21</sup> Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us, <sup>22</sup> beginning from John’s baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.”

<sup>23</sup> So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. <sup>24</sup> Then they prayed, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen <sup>25</sup> to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs.” <sup>26</sup> Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.

### Ascension Tapas (Acts 1)

With today being the Sunday after the Ascension, we looked at chapter 1 of Acts, split into two parts, which recounts the events surrounding Jesus’ ascension and what followed prior to the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, which we’ll celebrate next Sunday. And the way I want to approach Acts chapter 1 this morning is with what I call the tapas approach: T-A-P-A-S. I came up with this years ago after eating at a Tapas restaurant in Modesto that doesn’t exist anymore; I think it was called Concetta, anybody go there? Tapas, as I understand it, is a Spanish approach to eating where, instead of ordering a single entree, you order these small portions of multiple dishes - called tapas - and eat them family style at the table. So that’s sorta analogous to how I want to approach Acts chapter 1 today, picking out a few different spots to reflect on briefly, one-at-a-time, as each focuses on a different subject. And yet, there are two common themes that show up in each of the four tapas I want to share. And those are first 1) the varying levels of cluelessness about the things of God that we see from Jesus’s disciples - or Acts calls them His apostles<sup>1</sup> - which parallels how we (as His followers) can often be blind or mistaken about the heart or intentions of God. But number 2) is the good news that Jesus has plans for us that will always be better than leaning on our own understanding of what faithfulness looks like.

<sup>1</sup> A disciple is one who follows, an apostle is one who has been sent out to share a message. Since Acts chapter 1 occurs after the Great Commission, Luke refers to them as apostles.

## TAPAS 1 - ON RENOUNCING RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM

And where I want to begin - for our first tapas - I want to focus on verse 6, where the apostles - or disciples, I'll use those words interchangeably - bring up the subject of religious nationalism. But to set the stage: in the first five verses, St. Luke, who wrote the book of Acts, had updated us on how in the forty days *since* His resurrection Jesus had been appearing to the disciples on various occasions and teaching them, in anticipation of His Ascension and the sending of the Holy Spirit.

But on the fortieth day, Jesus has led His apostles up the Mount of Olives (v12), where they don't know it, but He is about to ascend into heaven! But they do know something is up - they sense he has brought them up the mount of olives because something special is about to happen - so they gather around Him and ask, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" Biblical Scholar Willie Jennings explains that this indicates the apostles believe that Jesus' resurrection means He will fulfill the nationalistic hopes that the people of Israel had clung to for the previous 500 years that they had lived under foreign occupation.<sup>2</sup> They have dreamed of once again living in a nation that reflects their religious values, rather than having to tolerate the hedonism of the Roman empire.

So, since Jesus' resurrection His disciples have been wondering if He would now topple Rome and restore Israel's kingdom to the heights it reached under King David. After all, Jesus had just taken Rome's *best shot* when they crucified Him and overcame it; so they can no longer kill him! He now has a body that can pass through locked doors and is immortal. If a revolutionary can't die, how could an empire overcome him?<sup>3</sup> Plus Jesus had embraced the identity as the promised son of David, of whom it has been prophesied that God would establish his throne that would last forever.<sup>4</sup> And yet, at His triumphal entry, Jesus had paraded into Jerusalem on a humble donkey, not a warhorse. So what the Apostles were still failing to understand is that through His resurrection Jesus intended not to resurrect a worldly empire made in believers' images, but to establish a spiritual kingdom.<sup>5</sup> The kingdom of God that verse 3 said He'd been speaking about - which might make more sense for us to translate as God's empire - is not a worldly empire but a heavenly empire, which comes about only through Jesus' followers following in his way of sacrificial love, not through using political power and coercion the people around us into adopting our moral values. **The good news is that Jesus has plans for us that will always be better than leaning on our own understanding of what faithfulness looks like.**

Now, some of us might shake our heads at the apostles' cluelessness after Jesus had tried every which way to disabuse them of their nationalistic imagination for the messiah. But, to be fair, they'd only had 40 days to make sense of the resurrection, we've had 2,000 more years of Church history. And yet, unfortunately - mistaking the work of the kingdom for attempting to Christianize worldly empires like our own in the United States - the seduction of religious nationalism - and mistaking the work of the kingdom with grasping for power to make worldly empires like our own in the United States in our own Christian

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<sup>2</sup> As empires rose and fell in the region, God's people were first exiled to Babylon, then returned to their land under the Persians. And after that they lived under Greek rule, and finally under the Romans.

<sup>3</sup> At the end of the day, the threat of death is all that worldly kingdoms have as their foundation.

<sup>4</sup> 2 Samuel 7:16

<sup>5</sup> Jennings: "the deeply human desire of every people to control their destiny and shape the world into their hoped-for eternal image. Nationalist desire easily creates a fantasy of resurrection and the fantasy of resurrection appeals to peoples, calling forth a triumphal vision of a nation that rises from death and is filled with conquerors and the powerful. Jesus, however, is not a sign of resurrection. He is its Lord. Resurrection will not define him. He will define resurrection's meaning and resurrection's purpose."

image - this temptation is no less seductive today, enough that plenty of Churches will endorse it as faithfulness.<sup>6</sup> But Jesus has called us to something different and something better.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, as the calendar creeps toward November and the politics of election season heat up, and we seek to discern whether there are any platforms we will support or politicians we will vote for, I invite you to bear in mind that there is nothing faithful about Christian Nationalism. Indeed, its impulses are at odds with the practice of empathy we talked about last week. And though both parties have been known to shamelessly appeal to Christian Nationalism to varying degrees, there *is no* Christian political party and there never will be. The United States can never be confused with the kingdom of God. Rather, in verse 8 Jesus makes clear that His kingdom is not to be restricted by national borders.<sup>8</sup> So, just as Jesus ignored the apostles' supplication to make a Christian worldly kingdom, we must resist this temptation as well; He calls us away from the worship of power to take up our cross and follow Him. ##

## **TAPAS 2 - ON ESCHEWING RELIGIOUS PREOCCUPATIONS THAT DON'T BEAR THE FRUIT OF LOVE**

So, the subject of our first tapas in Acts chapter 1 is Jesus redirecting His followers away from the seduction of religious nationalism. But this leads next to our second tapas in verses 10 & 11, so hopefully you're still hungry for more. :) Here, we see how God is also discouraging believers from becoming preoccupied with Jesus' return or the end times, particularly at the expense of the task He *has* given us.

After Jesus has just ascended into heaven in verse 9,<sup>9</sup> the Apostles are no doubt confused again. We're told they "were looking intently up into the sky" - probably trying to understand what just happened or beginning to wonder: "What now?" - when suddenly two angels appear and ask, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky?" And they continue, explaining, "This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." But this gentle scolding echoes how Jesus had just told the apostles in verse 7 (and elsewhere in the gospels<sup>10</sup>) not to concern themselves with the future timing that is out of their control, but to focus instead on the task He's given them to focus on how the Holy Spirit invites them into opportunities to live as Christ's witnesses to the world.

But we should receive this not only as a warning against preoccupation with end-times speculation, but against giving undue attention to anything that is religious but not actually loving - not actually having anything to do with the two greatest commandments of loving God and our neighbor - and mistaking that for faithfulness to Christ. Again, faithfulness is watching for how we can participate with the Spirit in loving others into the kingdom; and there is nothing more fulfilling than that! The good news is that Jesus has plans for us that will always be better than leaning on our own understanding of what faithfulness looks like.

<sup>6</sup> Jennings: "Nationalist fantasy has seeped into faith both Jewish and Christian and finds its ways into other faiths as well. Such fantasy dreams are completely understandable and quite compelling because they help us cope with the vulnerability that is creaturely life, and they reflect the power of accumulated wounds."

<sup>7</sup> To cultivate greater imagination for a political theology that is consistent with the reality of God's kingdom, check out this sermon from 5/29/22: video- [https://youtu.be/5SjHzyQ0W3k?si=-\\_rKIQAcmEvaFczz](https://youtu.be/5SjHzyQ0W3k?si=-_rKIQAcmEvaFczz) manuscript- [https://www.saintmatthiasoakdale.com/files/ugd/8c239b\\_695add7179ab462d8b0e6bbc6ae81912.pdf](https://www.saintmatthiasoakdale.com/files/ugd/8c239b_695add7179ab462d8b0e6bbc6ae81912.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Verse 8: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

<sup>9</sup> Clarifying what it means that Jesus "ascended into heaven" from 5/8/16 sermon: "The point of heaven is not that Jesus becomes a spaceman, rather it is the moment of his removal from human sight... to be in the spiritual place we call heaven... where God is. In the ascension, Jesus transitions from being here on earth to sitting at the right hand of God the father on the throne... reigning and ruling over the world."

<sup>10</sup> See Mark 13:32 & Matthew 24:36

### **TAPAS 3 - WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO: PRAY AND FELLOWSHIP AND PRAY**

But to the apostles' credit, they took this admonition to heart. And the way they respond in verses 13 & 14 is the subject of the third tapas I want to share: that when we are disoriented in a situation that life throws at us, when we don't know what to do, when we don't know how to proceed faithfully: the most indispensable elements of how we respond should be to pray and fellowship and pray. So the disciples are supposed to wait for God to send the Holy Spirit - which we know will happen ten days later at Pentecost, but they don't know that - so we have that hindsight, but they don't know what to do. How do you faithfully wait for the Holy Spirit? No one had ever had to do that. So verse 13 says the Apostles gather in a room together<sup>11</sup> - no doubt to talk things over - and verse 14 says, "They all joined together constantly in prayer." And I love that they do so along with the women and Mary.

You know, one thing that saddens me about our province, the ACNA, is that the College of Bishops is all men, which means that when they all get together to discuss matters - including when they'll get together to choose a new archbishop this June, there are literally only men in the room. But don't you imagine they could benefit from the voice and perspective of a woman now and again, on this matter or that?? (Lord, have mercy.) But they haven't asked my opinion, so for now it's just something to grieve (and pray about).

But back to this subject: as human beings seeking to live faithfully before God, we should *expect* that there will be occasions where we are disoriented and confused about what faithfulness looks like. And there may be a whole list of things that we need to do to get more clarity about the way forward in a particular situations - sometimes there is more information to gather, sometimes there is an element of waiting for things to play out - but what we would be wise to include on that list is to pray and to seek the wise counsel of other believers and to pray. Do you ever face a difficult situation where you're so busy trying to fix it that you forget to pause to ask God for wisdom and guidance or to give Him a chance to reveal or confirm that through another trusted believer? I certainly have failed to do that at times; and thanks be to God that He remains so gracious to us. But the good news is that Jesus has plans for us that will always be better than leaning on our own understanding of what faithfulness looks like. Is there some situation you're facing right now where you may be leaning on your own understanding, even if just by accident or habit? Our God, whose wisdom and goodness exceeds all of ours, invites us to give Him a chance to weigh in or alert us to perspectives we may have missed. #

### **TAPAS 4 - ON JUDAS ISCARIOT: IS THERE A LIMIT TO GOD'S FORGIVENESS?**

Well, the final tapas I want to share - with apologies to those who may already feel full - will actually not even get into the appointment of Matthias, whom our parish is named for. Instead, it is in response to the words of Luke about Judas Iscariot in verses 18 and 19<sup>12</sup> and Peter's words in verse 20. They reflect how the apostles had scapegoated Judas<sup>13</sup> - and the Church has tended to do this ever

<sup>11</sup> This room *seems* to be where the Holy Spirit falls on them ten days later during the Feast of Pentecost, as Acts 2:2 reports: "Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting."

<sup>12</sup> New Testament Scholar, Craig Keener, interprets these two verses as a digression by St. Luke, rather than the words of Peter.

<sup>13</sup> Jennings: "Peter and the other disciples are free, but Judas will carry the burden of collective guilt, the one and only betrayer of Jesus, the one and only failure in ministry. There is in this passage the necessary and magisterial ambiguity of divine opinion on this matter. The text could be read as saying that Peter is telling the story in exactly the way God tells the story, or it could be read as saying that Peter is telling the story in the way we tell the story about the dead and their mistakes, and their suicide, and their silence... It is true that the Holy Spirit is already speaking, according to Peter, in their reading of prophecy: a betrayer was foretold and Judas is that man."

In his book, *The Gospel According To Judas*, Ray Anderson discusses the need or tendency for communities to have a scapegoat. The scapegoat serves as the object for members of a community to project all of their fears on, fears that they would do the very things they are blaming the scapegoat for doing. This has occurred on a large scale as Christians have blamed Jews for the death of Jesus, knowing full well in their hearts that they would have been capable of the same evil [Ray S. Anderson, *The Gospel According To Judas*, (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Seminary Press, 1994)].

since - but it is important to remember that God is the hero of scripture, not figures like Peter,<sup>14</sup> and Peter doesn't get the last word on Judas, Jesus does.<sup>15</sup> And the Lord tends to be much more merciful to sinners than we might be inclined to be.<sup>16</sup> So I want to suggest that Peter and the other Apostles' posture toward Judas does not reflect the heart of God, but is rather a result of leaning on their own understanding and falling prey to the social phenomenon of scapegoating to cover over the shame they continued to experience for their own abandonment of Jesus<sup>17</sup> in his time of need.<sup>18</sup>

A seminary professor of mine, Ray Anderson, wrote a book titled The Gospel According to Judas, which is in our church library, and it addresses the two major questions that scripture's treatment of Judas raises - the spiritual implications of both his decision to betray Jesus *and* his decision to take his own life,<sup>19</sup> both of which are grounded in this question: is there a limit to God's forgiveness?

Now, this is not to minimize the magnitude of Judas' sin at all. No, his decision didn't kill Jesus - that is something Jesus willingly submitted to in Gethsemane and did not resist - but Judas's betrayal of Jesus was a devastating decision to both him and Jesus.<sup>20</sup> But was it an unforgivable sin? And my answer along with Anderson is a resounding No.

Some contend that betraying Jesus is evidence that Judas never really loved Jesus in the first place. But Anderson makes the point that love is the necessary prerequisite to betrayal; you can't betray someone you didn't first love.<sup>21</sup> Secondly, Matthew actually records that Judas was remorseful and

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<sup>14</sup> Anderson: "We know the first disciple to whom Jesus appeared was Peter (1 Cor 15:5). We can understand why, because on the very night that Jesus was under trial Peter had denied knowing Him. Peter's last memory of Jesus would have been the stricken face of his Lord gazing at him after Peter wore upon the very name of God that he did not know Jesus..."

"After his resurrection, Jesus found Peter before he could drown himself in his own remorse and sorrow. Peter was a chosen disciple and would not be permitted to lose what was given him as an inheritance through his own weakness and failure."

<sup>15</sup> Jennings: "The last word on Judas will not come from Peter. It will come from Jesus... The problem is a group of Jesus followers who are only at the beginning of coming to grips with his resurrection from the dead and what it means for how we speak of those who have died in shame, died in pain, died in guilt. Last words no longer belong to us. They have been seized by a savior. Jesus' power now reaches into the grave, into Judas's grave."

<sup>16</sup> Anderson: "None can be so cruel and merciless toward others as those who have no mercy on their own evil. Focusing on the sin of another is an effective device to cover awareness over our own evil" (18).

<sup>17</sup> Matthew 25:56

<sup>18</sup> Anderson: "I think it's possible that two thousand years later we still bear shame for the fact that Jesus was delivered over to death by the very persons he came to save. Judas must be punished in hell! The idea that he may have actually found forgiveness and restoration through Jesus Christ, as all of us hope to receive, makes some people angry.

"Our inner conflicts demand a Judas to bear the punishment for our unhealed shame. We are still anxious and uneasy about the seeds of betrayal in our own hearts. We need a Judas to dispel the uncertainty in our own love and commitment. Our sins have been atoned for, but we have only partially experienced the healing of being "saved by grace." (23)

<sup>19</sup> Note: Judas' suicide is described in Mt 27:1-10 and reference in Acts 1:18 to Judas falling headlong is most likely a reference to the aftermath of his death, when his body was taken down. (Keener)

<sup>20</sup> With interesting relevance to the first tapas of the sermon, Judas served as a "tool of the empire in the imprisonment, torture, and death of Jesus" (Jennings). And Anderson suggests Judas may have been attracted to Jesus out of desperation to find one willing to challenge the political power of Rome, (but) in the end, Jesus failed to match his fanatical zeal" (74).

<sup>21</sup> Anderson: "To love is to risk betrayal."

repentant prior to taking his life.<sup>22</sup> And finally, Jesus had chosen Judas,<sup>23</sup> just as (Paul explains that) He has chosen each of us who have come to know Him, where we become not merely “sinners saved by grace”, but “children of God”, a new identity. Therefore, as Anderson explains, “Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, the identity of the betrayer is not forever locked up in the act of betrayal. Betrayal does not have the last word on (God’s) love.” And so, Anderson imagines an interaction between Judas and Jesus in the afterlife where Jesus assures Judas that He forgives him, similar to what He took the opportunity to do with Peter in John chapter 21 (vv15ff).<sup>24</sup> Anderson suggests that the only reason Jesus didn’t do this with Judas during Judas’s life is because Judas’s suicide before the resurrection prevented Jesus from ever having the opportunity.

And this leads us to that question of suicide, which I’ll touch on briefly. We are saying that betrayal is not the unforgivable sin, but what about suicide? Is suicide sin? Absolutely.<sup>25</sup> And am I meaning to minimize its unspeakably awful effects? Absolutely not. If you are ever considering suicide, please reach out to me first or call a hotline; don’t suffer alone, your brain is lying to you! But nevertheless, it is deeply regrettable that beginning in the 6th century the church began denying regular burial and prayers to victims of suicide. Thankfully, in just my lifetime the Roman Catholic Church<sup>26</sup> and the Church of England moved away from this unmerciful stance.

I want to insist *along with* Anderson that,

“...through Jesus Christ we know that no sin can be the final word in our lives, nor can death as the consequence of sin be the final word. By his own death and resurrection, Christ has destroyed the power of death to seal our fate. Christ is the final word... (and) no death can overturn that word, even death that is self-inflicted.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> So why did Judas hang himself then? Anderson explains: “The power of the surrounding community in the life of the betrayer is enormous. For good or bad, the community creates the history of our lives. And so we learn to perceive ourselves constantly under the power of those who constitute our family and community. Here lies the source of shame that goes far beyond the guilt incurred for any single violation. *Shame is the perceived loss of our place with others...* It is this deep sense of shame, which seems to deprive us of our very right to exist, that drive many over the edge of guilt to suicide.

“Tom, a successful attorney, was caught embezzling money from a trust fund for which he was legally responsible. When his fraud was exposed, he took his own life rather than face his family and friends. He had been willing to plead guilty and suffer the consequences, but his feelings of shame could not be so easily resolved. He was driven to end his life rather than live with unending shame.

“Tom’s family and friends did not understand this desperation. Although they were embarrassed by his actions, they wanted to forgive him and see him restored. They could not grasp the depth of shame that destroyed his being because they did not comprehend the power of shame in hurt relationships. A confession of wrongdoing may pacify or remove feelings of guilt; a prison sentence can satisfy justice; compensation can even be made for money taken. But the dynamics of betrayal and the shame it produces are not easily understood or transformed.” (21-22)

<sup>23</sup> Luke 6:12-16 - <sup>12</sup> One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. <sup>13</sup> When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles: <sup>14</sup> Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, <sup>15</sup> Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, <sup>16</sup> Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.” (NIV)

<sup>24</sup> Read the two excerpts pasted at the end of the manuscript, where Anderson imagines a post-mortem interaction between Jesus and Judas.

<sup>25</sup> “(Suicide)...is condemned in the Bible by no text more specific than the Sixth Commandment (‘Thou shalt not kill’) unless, with rabbinic tradition, we read Gen 9:5 in this sense (‘Your life blood will I require). However, with the exception of Maccabee, where a heroic suicide in 2 Macc 14:16 [Note from Fr John: this is an Apocryphal text] echoes contemporary Roman ideals, the six clear biblical suicides are associated with God’s disfavour: namely those of Abimelech (Jgs 9:53-5), Achitopel (2Sam 17:23), Zimri (1Kgs 16:15-20), Saul (1 Chron 10:3-13), and Judas Iscariot (acc to Mt 25:7). ... Of the many grounds to establish (the wrongness of suicide), the most specifically Christian is the antithesis that suicide present to the Passion of Christ, who suffered extremes of pain and loss (including the loss of conscious sense of God’s presence) in loving acceptance of the Father’s will, and precisely by doing so did His work of redeeming mankind. (*Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*)

<sup>26</sup> The RC Church canons ceased to exclude victims of suicide from Christian burial in 1983 and adjusted their catechism in 1992 to still condemn suicide, but to state positively that “The Church prays for those who have taken their own lives.” (*Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*)

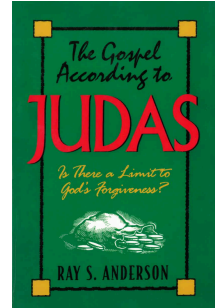
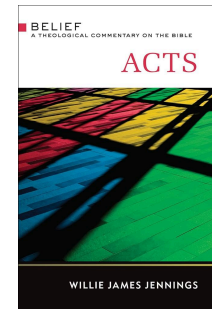
<sup>27</sup> See second pasted excerpt at the end of document addresses Judas’s suicide.

And so, when it comes to these matters, we mustn't lean on our own understanding, as I fear Peter and the other apostles were. The good news is that Jesus has plans for us that will always be better than leaning on our own understanding of what faithfulness looks like. #

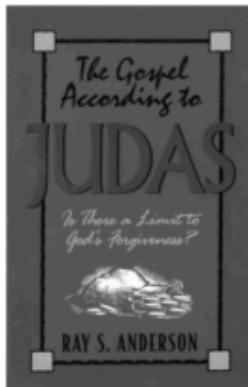
Well, it seems that these four tapas have made a full meal of a sermon and then some. Will join me in prayer about what the Spirit may have spoken to you as we've sought to feast on God's word?

*Lord, whatever you're showing to our hearts about faithfulness to you, would you give us the imagination for how to act on it - whether in how we engage politics or the energy we may give to religious interests that don't bear the fruit of love, your invitation to involve you and other believer in situations where we need greater wisdom, or even ways we can take encouragement from the story of Judas or take on a posture of greater empathy toward those who suffer. Whatever you have illuminated to our hearts for greater faithfulness to your heart, give us the imagination and willingness to move forward in that way.*

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



## EXCERPT A



### 12 Judas Come Home—All Is Forgiven

to whom the Lord first appears following the resurrection. We now step into this warp in time as witnesses to the dialogue between Jesus and Judas that we were never permitted to hear.

### THE MORNING AFTER

The confrontation between Jesus and Judas occurs in the very place Judas chose to take his own life. The cold wind of death is stilled; the howling horrors of hell are silenced. Satan is held at bay.

The power of darkness retreats in the presence of the glorious light and life of the risen Lord. The relentless logic of despair within the mind of Judas is made foolish by the sudden appearance of Jesus in the lonely place to which Judas retreated for his own final act upon the earth.

Judas is stunned, but not speechless. The skin on his neck is bruised from the rasping pull of the rope which jerked his head to the side. His throat is raw and hoarse from the shrieks of despair he threw out into the night as he plunged into the darkness.

He involuntarily jerks his arm away from the touch of Jesus. Judas will not be comforted. With a choking sensation he feels anger welling up, its urgency spilling over into words. . . .

(continues on next page)

(In the text that follows, a post-mortem interaction between Jesus and Judas imagined by Ray Anderson, the words of Jesus are in Italics, the words of Judas non-italicized.)

14 *Betrayal: The Unforgivable Sin?*

Yet You *do* torment me. You will probably tell me that You still love me, and so gain virtue for Yourself and add another millstone around my neck. Don't You realize that for the betrayer love is a cruel reminder of failure? Go away! I have enough pain without Your love punishing me further.

*I tell you that you love Me, and that is the cause of your pain and torment.*

You're talking nonsense. If I loved You I would not have betrayed You. After all, betrayal is not an act of love, it's an act of treachery. You can't deny the logic of that.

*Judas, betrayal is the sin of love against love. Unlike other sins, betrayal uses love to destroy what is loved.*

*This is why betrayal does not end a relationship, why you cannot put an end to our relationship by yourself. Forgiveness for the act of betrayal seems impossible if betrayal is the final act. Yet betrayal is not the end of love. You hate yourself because you love Me. You betrayed Me because you love Me.*

For me, betrayal was a single, final, and fatal act. An aberration in myself for which I can find no cause. I expected You to speak of Your love for me, but not of mine for You. What You're saying makes no sense to me.

## EXCERPT B

I will always be remembered as the one who betrayed You. I had no explanation to give, no justification for my action. I regretted it immediately—but regret is a bitter tonic that never cures.

*(Betrayal is a transaction between two, the betrayer and the betrayed, with both having a certain power in the exchange. Your power, Judas, was to destroy the relation; Mine to preserve it)*

I tried to deny my love for You and became blind to Your love for me. I have felt the power of that love, now that it's too late. If the sun could have stood still, and the hours and

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minutes slowed to an imperceptible crawl, there might have been time.

*Do you think that all that's needed to redeem oneself is more time?*

I speak only of enough time for You to have found me before I took vengeance upon myself by taking my own life. If betrayal is a transaction between two, death is a solitary act. And death by one's own hand is the most solitary of all deaths.

*And you think that by taking your own life you sealed your fate and plunged into the realm that God has forsaken? I have been to the Godforsaken place, Judas. It was on the cross, not in the black hole in your own soul. One death in a Godforsaken way is enough. I have died that death—and behold, I am alive!*