

**3** When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. **4** “I have sinned,” he said, “for I have betrayed innocent blood.”

“What is that to us?” they replied. “That’s your responsibility.”

**5** So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.

**6** The chief priests picked up the coins and said, “It is against the law to put this into the treasury, since it is blood money.” **7** So they decided to use the money to buy the potter’s field as a burial place for foreigners. **8** That is why it has been called the Field of Blood to this day. **9** Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: “They took the thirty pieces of silver, the price set on him by the people of Israel, **10** and they used them to buy the potter’s field, as the Lord commanded me.”

### **Don’t do this yourself!**

I love to watch do it yourself shows. I’m a big on vocational training, teaching people to do things on their own. I don’t believe that limiting a person is the proper way to train someone. That’s why I’ve started DIY groups in the past, from our Pioneer’s kid’s program with the unofficial name, “Lil - Woodbutchers” to more recently the DIY group, “Diy trying.” Hands on is how we learn, we make mistakes, and move on. There are times when I should admit defeat, take a blow to the pride, because I can’t and shouldn’t go on without help.

In Matthew chapter 27 we find Judas who is in a project way over his head but he hasn’t given up playing Mr. Fixit. He still thinks he can fix this or find a solution. The professionals advise him, “That’s your responsibility.” In other words, “Take care of it yourself.” But if anything Judas should have gone back to the disciples or even to Jesus for help. Instead he takes upon himself the solution of his problem, the solution of his sin and he does not fix anything.

We may be tempted to do the same thing. I’m not talking about home remodeling projects but something serious like salvation. Our Lenten sermon series is “Repent, Turn to Jesus,” but until you realize that’s not something you can do. You’ll keep trying and trying and possibly end up like Judas. We aren’t here to imitate Mr. Fixit. These words come to us from a very dark chapter. They’re not for us to imitate but they do serve as a warning. Don’t go alone. There are things you can’t do. But you have one who has turned to you to help.

The context is Judas betrayal of Jesus as well as his arrest and trial before the Sanhedrin. In Chapter 26 everyone of the disciples betray Jesus and abandon him. Peter then personal betrays the Son of God by calling down curses, *"I don't know the man"* (26:72). All of this betrayal happens before Matthew informs us Judas' solution to his problem. I doubt Matthew wrote the events in chronological order.

Judas got in over his head. I don't know why Judas betrayed Jesus. Some have speculated that he really believed that Jesus was the Christ and he betrayed Jesus in order to push him out into the public eye. I'm constantly trying to move Judas to a better place because I don't want him to be hell. He was one of Jesus disciples, one of the twelve, one who had seen Jesus word and works during his three year ministry. Certainly if anything one of those miracles would have an affect. Judas walked among the Word of God for three years.

But even then there are the not so shining moments of Judas life recorded in the gospel. Judas regularly helped himself to the money (John 12:6). On another occasion before entering into Jerusalem for the final time Mary anointed Jesus' feet with very expensive perfume and his comment, *"This could have been sold and given to the poor"* (John 12:5). Then this one. Betrayal – one that makes him look like a friend, betrayal by a kiss which allows him to save face before the other disciples. Maybe he just thought, "This boat is sinking quickly... I better bail while my head is still above water." Maybe he thought it would turn out differently, that Jesus wouldn't be condemned to die *"but when Judas saw that Jesus was condemned he was seized with remorse"* (Matthew 27:3).

If only Matthew had written, "He was seized with repentance." Repentance implies that one has arrived at a different view of something. They've had a change of mind. But remorse is simply a change of feeling. Judas is not sorry he did what he did rather he feels bad for what he has done. This is remorse, not repentance. For a Jew remorse means making amends by restoring what has been wrongfully taken. Judas takes the matter into his own hands and returns the 30 silver coins, seeks absolution from the priest but what he finds is they hate Jesus more than the love sinners. They tell him to do it yourself. But how ironic that they won't let him return the money. Judas however will not be denied righting this wrong hurls the money back into the temple and takes matters into his own hands, life for life, in order to make amends, right the wrong. Don't do this!

That's the same way we try to deal with problems. As a child if I broke something, I'd either hide it or try to fix it without my parents noticing. Sin is like walking into God's house and ignoring his rules, taking a treasured item off the shelf and smashing it on the ground. We then walk away saying, "Sorry," and expect that it should all be fine? It's insulting because we make light of sin. We tell God, "You shouldn't be upset about me ruining a perfect world. I already said I'm sorry."

The problem is not that Judas didn't think too much of his sin but he thought too little. He thought he could be restored to God with 30 pieces of silver. But when those coins couldn't take away his guilt he turned to the one thing he thought could. Don't do this.

There are times when we too think we can be restored to God through remorse. So we have to manufacture this regret in our minds and feel sorry for our actions when in reality we have no desire to repent and to change our mind we'd rather continue. That's not repentance. That's remorse. Some will even try to make worship a miserable experience of pain and suffering as if we come weekly to practice this weekly penance and somehow make up for the rest of the week.

Friends – that's not enough. That fixes nothing. You can't do this yourself. Yet we see this garbage on social media about "forgiving self" and "letting go of guilt," or searching for your own spirituality. You don't need to forgive yourself because you didn't sin against yourself. Letting go of your guilt is how a conscious becomes calloused and hearts hardened to sin. You don't need to seek for a solution in yourself because you are the problem, me too. What one is trying to do is convince themselves these feelings of guilt can go away because I'm innocent. But the truth is we've sinned against God. We have betrayed innocent blood. Isaiah writes, "*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all*" (Isaiah 53:6).

God has done something. He sent a professional to take care of what've ruined. It's only sad that Judas didn't believe Jesus could forgive his sin.

Judas thought, "God can't forgive me. My sin is too great for God." Judas called God a liar. The only difference between Peter's betrayal and Judas' betrayal is who they turned to. Peter returned to the disciples. Judas took things into his own hands and went back to the ones who convinced him to betray Jesus. He went back to the corrupt priests who suddenly turn accountants making sure they don't misappropriate funds.

Even the priests tried to "do the right thing all by themselves." They said, "*It is against the law to put this money into the treasury.*" Yeah I'm pretty sure it's also wrong

to bribe someone into betraying an innocent person but what does the law matter? In a feign of looking like nice guys they buy the potter's field which happened to be the place where Judas hung himself. After hanging there for some time he fell. Finally mr. Potter comes along to make earthen vessels for cooking and storage and finds the source of his clay has become defiled by death. It's no use to him anymore. The problem is brought to the priest who save the day by buying the field and turning it into a graveyard for Gentiles. But why couldn't the Gentiles be buried among the Jews? Oh yeah that's right... It was all based on what they've done.

When you think of repentance as your work rather than God's work, your entire concept of repentance is changed. Repentance becomes your way for making up for sin. You repent in order to regain God's approval. It's important to for everyone to understand that suicide isn't what caused Judas' condemnation but lack of faith. Suicide is a forgivable and so is betrayal, but unbelief rejects God and his payment for sin.

*Then what was spoken by Jeremiah was fulfilled: "They took the thirty silver coins, the price set on him by the people of Israel, and they used them to buy the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me."*

Such dark lesson, full of evil men fighting against God's plan. But no matter how dark and beyond hope the days have been. No matter how evil people are fighting against God, no matter how horrific the outcome God's Word is fulfilled. God is able to accomplish his will and he sends someone to fix the mess we've made. A betrayal worked out salvation. Scheming priests fulfilled scripture. Jesus didn't remain dead but he rose and rules. Jesus saves. We are saved not by our acts of repentance but by the *"blood of Jesus, his son, purifies us from all sin."* (1 John 1:7).

Don't do this yourself! Go back to your brothers and sisters. Go back to God's Word. Hold each other accountable. Because we can't turn to Jesus on our own. But Jesus turns to us with every word he spoke. When his captors came he let his disciples go. He called Judas the one identified as the betrayer a friend. He called Peter his brother. He calls to us in Word and Sacrament and gives us the strength to turn from sin and turn to our God. Don't think, "I can do this all by myself." I can't.

Sometimes we need to be reminded of that. Those blows to the pride. Those times when I've admitted defeat were usually after thinking I can fix this. My body will heal this naturally but then my more sensible half reminds me. "The emergency room isn't that far. That cut is pretty deep. You're bleeding on the kitchen floor and I'll drive." I can't

fix myself physically. I can't fix myself spiritually either. Thank God he sent one who can and has fixed us. Amen.