

The night was quite light because of the moon playing games with the clouds. A group of men carrying torches and swords were marching determinedly. Judas was in the middle and his insides were all churned up. He was really nervous and his heart was racing and his adrenalin pumping through his body.

Judas remembered the time that he discovered that he didn't fit in with Jesus.

It was a dim candlelit room, many men were gathered. There was awkward and stunted but polite conversation. There was the Pharisee who owned the house and a few others who had been invited, they were dressed in all their splendour, uniform in their garb and theology—sporting pasty complexions from being inside studying the bible all day. Then there was Jesus and his bunch of disciples a motley crew who looked at least by comparison, malnourished, tanned, and smelt of fish.

The Pharisee looked at Jesus who was reclining across from him. He studied him intently wondering if this guy Jesus was for real or whether he was a fraud. He was popular and dangerous. He was a new breed of prophet.

“Some grapes Jesus?” offered the Pharisee and without waiting for a reply motioned his slave to take it over to his guest. He then forced a smile at Jesus. Awkward silence.

Judas lurked at the back of the room, carefully weighing up what was going on. He was a thinker and he remembered that, at this point anyway, he was quite impressed with Jesus. Miracle after miracle, teaching after teaching . . . not bad for a carpenter's son from Nazareth. But he wasn't totally convinced by Jesus, he didn't feel like he could take on board everything Jesus talked about—especially the stuff about poverty.

No-one likes being told that they already have enough, well, in fact, that they have too much. That's just the truth of it and Judas liked his things. His dream was to go out and buy a plot of land somewhere and settle down. But Jesus was telling

people that there is no value in material things. But he was caught. He had a lifestyle. He wasn't rich, but he wasn't poor. He was comfortable perhaps. It's hard to say . . . because the disease of capitalism that we have today is not something he would've understood. There was more of a community spirit, more people knew each other because you were more likely to grow up with people. Choices of occupation were limited, first of all mainly to men—you more often than not inherited the family business. If your father fished, then you fished.

It wouldn't stop people carrying dreams like many of us carry or have carried dreams. But if the preacher came up to you and said, "alright. You've got enough now. Go and sell whatever you don't need." How would you react? What is it that you would do? Would you? It's at these points of faith that we often find ourselves justifying things.

I don't know how many of you read in the herald that Americans are over 3 times more likely to suffer depression than they were in the fifties. Yet there is more wealth. There are more things. There are more ideals of living lifestyle now.

People work enormous hours, make amazing compromises to protect lifestyle. And why? We make these choices. Do we have enough? Why do we need more?

Community is no longer about being, but about recognition. Three quarters of American households have internet access. Is it an improvement?

But if Jesus said, "You don't need the technology . . ." would we give it up? If Jesus said, "Lifestyle is not what you own." Would we change it?

To the Pharisee sitting across the table some big questions were being asked by Jesus. "Give up your 'religion' and engage with the spirit of the law, not the letter. Then you will find you are living a righteous life."

As the awkwardness of that time at the Pharisee's house continued, Judas was confronted with a conflict of ideologies. Here was Jesus who was proclaiming one way of living, and here were the ministers of religion who were holy. As the tension was forming,

Judas found he was conflicted. He was torn between the way he had been taught things should be, and this new way that Jesus was talking about.

One way had power over people. It was organised, it was concise, it was rigid, and it was systematised. It was beautiful in its complexity, it was historic, it had strong tradition, it was honouring to God in very specific ways.

Jesus on the other hand presented risk. He was calling for a departure from all that to embrace a way of life that dedicated everything, without fail, everything to God. Everything. So much so that things were being said that turned the world upside down. To be the first you must be the last. The idea of life was to serve God through serving others : whatever you do to the least of these, you do to me. Religion was a practical thing to Jesus.

It must have been confusing. It must have been difficult for Judas who had good knowledge of both the expectation of the strict religious regulations that the Pharisee taught and modelled as holiness, and the almost anarchic, fly by the seat of your pants, down to earth modelling of Jesus. And the truth was, that he saw more power in Jesus than he did in the Pharisee : the Pharisee didn't perform miracles. But he looked a whole lot holier than Jesus. As he was observing the tension in the room, the antagonism between the two views of holiness, a woman burst into the room.

She didn't say a word. But she was well known to everyone. She was the local prostitute. A woman who devoted her life to sexually pleasing other men, making her body at their disposal. Prostitutes were according to Deuteronomy 23:18 "abhorrent to the lord." This was a critical moment in that room. What would the reaction of each man be?

She went to where Jesus was reclining and stood at his feet weeping. Then she took a jar of expensive perfume and poured it over his feet. And wiped away her tears that fell on his skin with her hair.

The Pharisee was beside himself with disgust.

"Does this man Jesus not know who this woman is?" he asked the rest of the room knowing full well that Jesus actually did know. He was trying to make a

point. He had a smug look on his face when he turned back to Jesus. “Jesus, what are you doing? You are being defiled here by letting her touch you. Stop it at once before we are all spurned by God as being your accomplice in this heinous act. You aren’t very holy after all are you?”

Judas thought he had a good point to make here too. “Jesus, come on. Even if you have different ideas about holiness and values surely you can see that she’s broken one of the values you’ve been talking about with us. She could have sold that perfume and given the money to the poor. Instead you’ve let her waste it on your feet. Speak some sense into her. Tell her what you tell us. Sell your stuff and give the money to the poor.”

Jesus looked around the room at all the frowns and expressions of dismay. They expected a reply. Even the woman had recoiled with fear of a situation that was becoming more and more explosive by the moment. Jesus looked at her reassuringly and she felt for the first time, at least on the same level as the Pharisees who condemned her.

“Judas, you don’t get it do you. In fact none of you get it. Look at her. Here is a woman who is deeply hurt, deeply in need of God’s love and deeply apologetic. You, the religious ones are supposedly the agents of that love, and you spurn her. Is she only a prostitute to you? Is that all you see before you see her tears?”

“Can you not see in this woman, a change? A most wonderful and profound change? Or will you carry her history, keep her inside a box of being a sinner? Will you not let her ever be more than that? Is there no restoration in your theology? She remains separate from you because as long as you can judge her, you feel better.

“Is there no sense where you can let her become beautiful again? Do you not understand, that while I don’t like her prostitution, I love her and I love her change of heart? She is respecting God more than any of you.

“Is it not right Judas that she should pour that which is most precious to her, the very perfume that

she wears to make herself acceptable to men who use and abuse her, is it not appropriate that she should pour that out on my feet? Look at the beautiful irony. She is putting an end to her old life by sacrificing it. She is being restored.

You judge and condemn. But judgement and condemnation belong to God and God alone. I will judge and give mercy not condemnation.” And he turned to her and said, “Precious child of mine, your sins are forgiven.”

Judas remembered this moment. And he hated it because Jesus was just so full of contradictions. He didn't understand Jesus at all. The other disciples agreed with everything, but Judas disagreed at a fundamental level. You don't touch prostitute and you don't knock the establishment—but really, maybe he wanted some of that money for himself . . . the disciples didn't really trust him as their treasurer.

So Judas found himself feeling a little uneasy now. He looked around at the angry mob of people who were with him. “Where did they all come from?” he asked himself, not really wanting to know the answer.

It was dark and they were wandering up a well worn path to one of Jesus' favourite places. Judas looked at the ministers of religion who were steeled toward arresting Jesus. This was like arresting a common criminal thought Judas. “We do this to people who have wronged society : yeah and Jesus has wronged society.” He began to dream how he would spend his money.

He flashed back to just a few weeks before.

The chief priests were murmuring in the corner. Scheming and conniving to work out the best way to get rid of Jesus. They were biding their time and waiting for an opportunity to arrest Jesus and kill him without there being an uproar of the people. It's the problem with these really popular types, they can't be disposed of quickly. They heard someone enter the room and looked up to see Judas.

They glanced at each other and then one of them turned his gaze and made eye contact in a condescending kind of way. He recognised Judas from

the dinner where the woman ‘annointed’ Jesus. He smiled a little, and offered dismissively, “Yes?”

Judas was a bit nervous, but was convinced that he was doing the right thing. He started to shake a little and his voice began to tremolo. He cleared his throat, took a deep breath. “how much will you give me if I organise it so you can arrest Jesus in a quiet spot?”

The chief priests looked at each other again, intrigued by this suggestion. This is what they wanted. It was beautiful, the demise of Jesus was going to be coming from within his own ranks! Excellent they thought, this could work very well. Judas would get all the blame and they would just be tidying up the pieces. Most people would be stoked at how well they had handled the clean up as this is all that they would see.

But they inquired. “Why do you want to do this?”

“I’ve had it with Jesus. He makes all these demands and we never seem to gain any benefit. We see all this talk and action, but no actual real change. My doubts about him are just too strong now.

“He said he was bringing in a new era . . . show me. Show me this new time of peace and love. Show me what he calls the kingdom of heaven? You know what I am talking about. You know when you ask Jesus to be a part of your life and you submit stuff to him and nothing? I tell you, it’s all hard work, and no gain.

“I’m still the same. I still have the same struggles. Nothing has changed, all he’s done is annoy you guys. I think I prefer the more formalised stuff that you guys are into—there seems to be more assurance that I have a relationship with God. I want Jesu out of my system once and for all.”

Which wasn’t strictly true. Judas wanted some cash as well. What we say and what we feel are often two different things. He only communicated a small amount of his true motives. He wanted compensation. And perhaps it isn’t something we should condemn him for. He had given up three years of his life to this man Jesus and ended up with nothing but humiliation. He didn’t really fit in, especially as he began to feel a bit hurt by Jesus’ harsh words and rebukes. You can’t

blame him really, we see the whole picture, he just saw the immediate situation and thought he could put an end to it. His heart was compromised, true, but is that so different than many of us? How many of us would feel ripped off? He wasn't really that evil, he just made a big compromise that we can look back on and despise. The reality is though, that many of us are as guilty of this. Do we not make compromises over some very fundamental aspects of our faith?

We can put him in his little box, write him off as a bad egg, and keep him at a distance. Are we so different to the Pharisee?

“Let them who are without sin, cast the first stone.”

“We'll give you enough money to buy yourself a field. How's that?” “That's fine.” And from that moment on he sought an opportunity to catch Jesus out.

The torches of the mob flickered in the breeze as they trooped over the moonlit ground. There was the sound of swords and spears brushing up against the armour of the soldiers who were there.

“Overkill”, thought Judas. “But if they want to make a song and dance about it they can.” He actually felt sorry for Jesus for a few moments. But the hatred that was fuelled by wounded pride soon put those feelings in check. “That Jesus, is an idiot. He should've just towed the party line—he would have made a great teacher at the synagogue. But he had to go radical. What I'm doing is the best for all people concerned. I'll put this whole thing to rest.” He liked the simplicity of this plan.

It was perfect, after dinner when they were in Jerusalem they usually went for a walk in the garden of Gethsemane. They took the time out to pray and talk quietly. It was a nice habit and because it was a private garden owned by a friend of Jesus, there would be no crowds.

Jesus would be there with his disciples who would be a little relaxed from the wine they had just drunk.

What he didn't like though, and he was a bit nervous about this, was that Jesus seemed to know what was going on. It was odd though. How come at

this supper that they had just had, how come Jesus had let him sit next to him? How come Jesus still laughed and joked with him? How come Jesus still smiled, and smiled genuinely at him? How come Jesus, if he knew that he was about to be betrayed by Judas, how come he didn't do anything?

But then Jesus did announce that someone was going to betray him. And everyone looked around the room. Judas went bright red, but thankfully the room was dimly lit so no-one noticed. It just didn't make sense. He can't know, he was just bluffing. If he knew he would be protecting himself. Or maybe he does know and maybe this is an ambush? He was now thankful for the soldiers and their swords.

Boy he had hated that entire meal. Sitting through the rituals, yeah Jesus knew something was up. This is my body broken for you . . . this is my blood poured out for you . . . why would he say that if he didn't know?

And as he was agonising over the meal and his stomach cramps got stronger they suddenly came into the clearing. It was too soon, he needed more time to get his wits together. There was some panic. The stage was set. Jesus was standing there, he looked really tired and worn out, he was also sweating profusely. He looked like he had been crying for hours. The other disciples were sleepy and weren't really with it. They had just heard Jesus say to them, "Get up. The time has come when I am going to be turned over to the hands of sinners."

There was a brief pause as everyone took in the new turn of events. It was a full moon and it was quite plain who Jesus was. But no-one moved.

Judas looked at the priests with a "it's kind of obvious which one is Jesus, don't you think?" kind of look. They just looked back at Judas and motioned him to go and give the sign. They were too happy about the irony that they were about to witness.

And Judas heart pounding, hands shaking, breathing deeply, sweating, nervous as hell, walked up to Jesus, across what seemed like a great expanse even though it was about 5 metres of clearing. He walked

up to Jesus and faked a terrible smile. “Hello Teacher!” and kissed him on his cheek.

A kiss. An act of love and respect now an act of hate. Judas up until this moment had been motivated by all the hurt at seeing the failure of Jesus to make a difference in this world. He had been letting his disappointment in Jesus overwhelm and cloud his better judgement. And as he walked up to Jesus, he was motivated by his stern commitment to put an end to this charade. He didn't think about the fact that Jesus would say something to him straight after.

“You betray me with a kiss?” the look of pained surprise on Jesus' face, the awful irony of the kiss, suddenly dissolved all the resolve away from Judas and he was overcome with a terrible shame. Jesus' eyes were fixed on Judas as he backed away.

The soldiers rushed up to Jesus' side and grabbed him, shoving the disciples out of the way. But Jesus stared at Judas. There was disappointment, but there was love, there was judgement, but mercy; there was fear, but peace. The stare of Jesus overwhelmed all the commotion that was going on around Judas and he receded into the darkness of the night.

Before he left he heard a man screaming, “My ear, My ear.” One of the disciples had drawn a sword and struck the man in the side of the head.

The priest looked at Judas, “Thank you Judas, nothing to see here, go and enjoy your hard earned cash.” Judas fled the scene as Jesus was shouting, “You come here with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit? Why when you had all the opportunity in the world when I was preaching in broad daylight on the temple steps, why come like cowards now?”

And the shouts of the angry mob were left behind as Judas ran as fast as he could into the darkness which was the only place he felt safe because of his shame.

The gentle breeze swayed the body as it swung by a rope from the tree. Things didn't go to plan for Judas. Things didn't go well at all. He thought they would just throw Jesus in prison, whip the “god” out

of him, quietly dispose of him. He thought they would treat him fairly. But it was clear when they sent him to the Roman Governor that the whole trial was a sham.

He went back to the priests and asked them to take back the money. He was desperate to make right. That stare of a friend who still loved him though he had been betrayed. The stare. It penetrated to his very core and he felt filthy. Judas agonised and said to the priests, “I have sinned! I have sinned, take back my money please.”

And they looked at him and said “not our problem”, so in fury he threw the money on the floor and stormed out.

Gentle breeze swaying the body of Judas. The last thing he ever did for Jesus was kiss him. In his shame he killed himself. Even to death he couldn't let Jesus restore him. I don't know how much a burden it was that Judas felt that he bore, but it was enough for him to hang himself. The deliberation that he went through must have been exhausting and would have lasted hours. Could Jesus have forgiven even Judas? Yes, because right up to the last minute, Jesus treated him with respect, with love and compassion. Jesus never rejected Judas. Judas needn't have rejected Jesus.

Judas. A man who lived in doubt and regret. Who couldn't let Jesus penetrate through his walls. A man who was perhaps not as evil as we would like to think. Maybe we are more like him than we think. Maybe we are not prepared to take the difficult teachings of Jesus to the radical level they are pitched at. Where is our sacrifice? Not for church, not for the poor, not for religious devotion, but because we want to lay everything at the feet of Jesus as an act of worship and adoration?

Judas was not the only one who let Jesus down that night. All the disciples fled the scene and left Jesus alone.

I wonder how much some of us teeter on the brink of desertion! But Jesus still ate with the disciples at the last supper. Knowing full well that these men would desert him, he still ate a meal but more. He created a

ritual that would be celebrated by followers of Jesus for the next 2000 years. He created that ritual with not the faithful, but the unfaithful. He created it with a bunch of people that would have a rocky road ahead, even one that would betray him. But Jesus placed this precious ritual in the hands of normal people like us.

You may not feel like you are worthy, but this is a table of grace. It is a table of mercy. It is a table of God's unconditional love for not just us as individuals, but us as a community.

The Lord God let his mercy overcome our fears and inhibitions

The Compassion of Jesus melt us into his likeness

The Power of the holy spirit be overwhelm us to become agents of change in as we go into a world that is desperate though ignorant of his love.