

Tango

“Let Jesus.”

John 13:21-30

Fifth in the series: Living the Dance (living through trials)

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First United Methodist Church of Royal Oak, Michigan

Awake!

Judas! Judas! What has become of you? You once walked in the light. Now you stand in the shadows of night as they lead him away.

And you remain...

...in darkness.

You used to command such control of your self and, it seemed, control of that which was near you. Of the whole lot of his followers, it was you who could read and write. You managed the treasury. And it was you that Jesus most often kept at his left hand – the place of dearest friendship and highest authority.

Now speak of control and there is none in your world. All has erupted into bedlam. And now the seat of chaos...is you.

What, Judas: what has become of you?

The Saddest Account

You were among those we considered the true Israelites. Son of Simon Iscariot, ish Karioth that is, man of the city south of Hebron and Jerusalem. Your character was formed only a stone's throw from Masada, the last holdout of Jews in the first uprising against the Romans. It was a center of Jewish patriotism, where tolerance for their oppression was thin but hope was thick for the day when God's people would again be as a light to the nations.

That was your passion, was it not? Some say you were one of those they called the Zealots. If that was so, your early years were spent plotting for an armed revolt and probably engaged in acts of insurrection. This much is certain, you longed for the day when the Promised One would appear and lead your people to triumph.

And it was there in the region of the River Jordan among those who gathered around the prophet John who baptized, that you first met Jesus. Did you see John point to him? Did you hear him say, “There goes the Lamb of God”?

You did follow him. And I can tell you had a feeling that mounted slowly with each of his lessons and every turn of events: he would be the fulfillment of your hope. Then, he must have seen much in you – even while the sons of Zebedee tried to position themselves and Simon Peter drew attention with his brash character. You were the studied one. Quiet and confident: he placed you in charge of the funds and put you in the position of greatest influence.

It’s said that his disciples were with him at the wedding feast. You must have seen it. Appearing with nothing to contribute, you all enjoyed the days of celebration until the supply of wine ran out. And you heard Jesus’ mother appeal to him and, a master of timing yourself; you must have understood his refusal to act. Then, at her insistence he went to the servants and told them to fill the jars with water. These were the jars set aside for purification. When they did as he said they had the steward of the feast taste a sample: and he exclaimed to the groom that this was the best wine of the feast; and I bet you knew, Judas son of Simon ish Karioth, that you’d see even greater things from this Jesus.

And you did. Before your eyes you saw him cast out demons that had possessed and destroyed the people.

He taught with authority and stood up to the Pharisees who had long been in control by the heaviness of their teachings.

Those teachers of the Law were severe and inflexible in their strict interpretation of the Torah. They were cautious when it came to the Romans. It was apparent that they did not blame the oppressors for the oppression. Instead they blamed the people for moral lapse; and so they had been convincing that the brutality you sought to end was the fault of the victims. They said his was God’s punishment – so, they taught not to oppose the Romans who could destroy what little life was left. Just obey: obey the Romans; obey the Law as they interpreted it to every jot and every tittle.

Predictable, that they should oppose Jesus when he gave the people hope and when he violated the Law when it got in the way of God’s grace. Jesus broke the Sabbath when he healed and said Sabbath was made for the sake of people and

showed God's love was not reserved to heal them only on other days when their need was immediate. When they threatened and stormed, Jesus was firm; he was in control.

You liked that. It proved he was the one you expected: the true Savior sent from God who would gather the people like an ocean tide and drive the Romans out.

You became certain, didn't you? Jesus was the Messiah. You were absolutely convinced. And you were absolutely devoted.

What became of you, Judas *ish Karioth*?

When did you begin to turn? Was it after he fed the multitudes? Five thousand had sought him out. They came to him for healing and hope. There, in the lonely place there was no visible source of food to feed them and the hour had grown late; but rather than turning them away he asked you and the rest of the twelve what you did see. Only a few loaves and fish brought by a boy for his lunch. The boy gave it and the Lord blessed it and you served them. The miracle was overwhelming, like the heavens opened with manna to sustain them all. It was a clear sign from God.

You all slipped away after that. Yet, the crowds found you. It was clear that they wanted to take Jesus by force and make him king right then and there. This was to be what you had waited and worked and prayed for your whole life! Yet, he would not have it and he spoke to them with such challenge of purely spiritual things that he turned them away.

A lost opportunity! Not the control you knew he should have. Only the twelve of you were left. He turned to and asked if you would leave him too. It was Simon Peter who said no; but what would you have said, Judas, if you had answered?

Is that when you began to set some funds aside without telling the rest? Is that when you began to see where it was all going to end?

It became clear that you had a change of heart. You were at Bethany, not far from Jerusalem, at the home of Mary and Martha and Lazarus. Then during dinner Mary took a pound of costly perfume and poured it over Jesus' feet, wiping them with her hair. The scent of the perfume filled the room, thick and sweet and extravagant. You were disgusted: you objected out loud. "This could have been sold and the money given to the poor!" you said. I bet you didn't understand what he meant when he said to leave

her alone, Mary had bought the perfume for his burial, you always would have the poor but you would not always have him.

You were ambivalent even when you followed him in procession down the road and into the city, the people waving branches and laying their cloaks on the road before him. A part of you so wanted this to be his time and God's kingdom to come as you designed it.

Yet you knew: Jesus would not seize control as you would have him. He would not do as you would tell him to do.

Was that the day you decided no longer to follow him...but to lead?

They say it takes two to tango. You danced with Jesus – but you tried to take the lead.

The chief priests needed a way to seize him without causing a riot. Perhaps you wanted a way to force his hand, get him to make a move as you would have him do. 30 pieces of silver, the going price for a slave: you took the bribe.

Then you ate with them in the upper room when Jesus got up from the table and took a towel like a servant. He washed your feet. And he said we should all be like him and wash one another's. You didn't understand what he meant, Judas, did you.

He became troubled. You could see there was something tearing his heart in two. Then he said, "It's going to happen. One of you is going to betray me."

What did you think? Was he onto you? Did he know? Would he go along with your plan and do as you would make him do? This is my body, he said. This is my blood.

You were right there beside him. Certainly, when he dipped the crust of bread in the dish of wine and placed it in your hand...

He gave himself over to you.

You left quickly. And when you left, you went out of the light and you entered the night...

Forgone Conclusion

You led the soldiers and the Temple Guard – and you found your friends in the Garden, just as you planned. You approached him: warmly, cheerfully giving him a kiss. You thought you had it all in control.

You expected him to do something, didn't you?

They laid hands on him. You thought this was your time: it would be his time as you would have it. Simon Peter drew a sword. He understood, surely.

Yet I can see this is when your soul went dead. Jesus stopped the fight. He healed the man Peter struck...and he just gave himself to arrest.

You couldn't force his hand, could you Judas? While you could not accept Jesus as he was, you could not either change him into what you wanted him to be.

Finally you must know: *you* are not in control.

There is no control in your world. All has erupted into bedlam. And now the seat of chaos...is you.

At the end of this day, you cannot be God.

You have destroyed the only One you absolutely need.

And who would ever forgive...

the likes of you?