

Entrust your Heart to Him

Acts 1:15-17,21-26; 1 John 5:9-13; John 17:6-19

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You know the progression – Good Friday, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost – Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension, the coming of the Holy Spirit. After the resurrection, Jesus remained for forty days during which he appeared to Peter, the other apostles, and even to more than 500 disciples simultaneously. At the end of that period, he instructed them to wait for the empowering of the Holy Spirit, commissioned them to evangelise and ascended from their sight to sit at the right hand of God the Father.

Forty days after Easter was last Thursday when we celebrated the Ascension. Ten more days will be next Sunday – Pentecost.

After the Ascension they were left with a matter to deal with. Jesus had appointed twelve apostles but Judas had betrayed Jesus and was dead. The number of apostles needed to be restored. Jesus had said to them that they were to be his witnesses to all the world. These apostles had been physically present with Jesus through his ministry. They were commissioned by him. They saw him in his resurrection body. In the gospel passage, which is part of Jesus' prayer after the Last Supper, he said of the Apostles that he had given revelation to them and they had believed him. They had believed with certainty that he was sent by God the Father.

It was important that the twelve leaders be re-established for the first development of the early church. In the Jewish setting of that time, if any group were to represent itself as the righteous remnant calling the Jewish nation to repentance and permeating it with God's glory, then it must represent Israel in proclamation and in symbolism: Twelve tribes – twelve apostles. In the same way, the Qumran community had twelve leaders. Jesus himself had said the twelve disciples would have a kingdom and they would sit on thrones and judge the twelve tribes of Israel¹.

The one they chose would need to have been with them from the baptism until the Ascension.

After the Ascension and before Pentecost, Peter urged the group of believers to appoint a replacement apostle. Judas had betrayed Jesus for money. He had now died. Not only does Peter find reference to Judas' betrayal in the Psalms but also the prescription to appoint another in Psalm 109. He quoted from Psalm 69:25-28

May their place be deserted; let there be no-one to dwell in their tents. For they persecute those you wound and talk about the pain of those you hurt. Charge them with crime upon crime; do not let them share in your salvation. May they be blotted out of the book of life and not be listed with the righteous.

And also from Psalm 109:2-8

... wicked and deceitful men have opened their mouths against me; they have spoken against me with lying tongues. With words of hatred they surround me; they attack me without cause. In return for my friendship they accuse me, but I am a man of prayer. They repay me evil for good, and hatred for my friendship. ... May his days be few; may another take his place of leadership.

So, the disciples chose two of those who had been close followers of Jesus and then they prayed for the Lord to make the selection as they cast lots.

¹ Luke 22:28-30

When they prayed, they said, "you know everyone's heart." That is a single word: *kardiagnostes* – 'heart-knower.' He knows our hearts. Do you wonder if you are understood? God is *kardia-nostes* he is the heart-knower. Take comfort from that, he knows your heart and he loves you.

Let's consider Judas. He was a follower of Jesus; yet in the end, he betrayed Jesus. There is quite a fashion for excusing Judas – even making him the victim of the plot. However, his fellows of the time did not see it that way. Before you jump to the conclusion this was a vindictive attitude of the other apostles – remember that they like us were taught to forgive. If we are able to make allowances for Judas, would they not have done so too?

Jesus had hinted that one would betray him. The scriptures would have warned him that he would be betrayed by someone close. For example from Psalm 41, "Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me"² - a verse he quoted during the Last Supper when he indicated Judas would betray him.

Judas had responded to the call to follow Jesus. He was with him and the disciples for three years. But something was wrong. We first get an inkling of trouble when Judas criticised Mary for pouring out the jar of anointing oil to honour Jesus. He sourly accused her of waste and that it would be better to sell it and give the money to the poor. Mary had just received her brother back from the dead and had come to the understanding that Jesus truly is divine – so she honoured him with the most precious thing she had. But Judas' heart was not in tune with such devotion. He was not honouring Jesus extravagantly. Rather John tells us that Judas was a thief and as keeper of the common purse used to help himself to the money – so he wanted the proceeds of the sale of the perfume for himself.

Here then is a persistent sin, indulged in right alongside Jesus, when Jesus had entrusted him with their funds. That is pretty blatant!

At the Last Supper, even at that stage, Jesus was still trying to reach him. When he said one of them would betray him, John asked him quietly who it was³. Jesus told him it was the man to whom he would give the piece of bread. Then he dipped it and gave it to Judas. This itself was a gesture of peace – at the Passover meal the head of the dinner would honour someone by this action. Jesus honoured Judas, still trying to reach him. But to no avail - Judas had determined his course of action. He left the gathering.

Soon after this, Jesus prayed the prayer we heard,

"While I was with them, I protected them [his followers] and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled."⁴

The one doomed to destruction is literally "the son of perdition." The NIV Bible Commentary says,

"The language does not imply that Judas was a helpless victim who was destined to perdition against his will. Rather it implies that, having made his decision, he had passed the point of no return; and by so doing, he carried out what the Scriptures had indicated would happen."⁵

We see a man who was going through the form of following Jesus but not from his heart. We would do well to take care that our following of him is more than the form - more than going to church - there needs to be the heart engagement and loyalty too. There needs to be the change of heart which Jesus calls being born again. It is a new life in the old shell. That was lacking in Judas.

That naturally brings us to the question of being sure we are saved. John addresses that in his First Letter which we read. He said he wrote so that we may know we have eternal life. He wrote of the evidence we have that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. The reference to the water and the blood, is generally understood to mean Jesus' baptism and death. At the baptism and before the crucifixion, God spoke audibly from heaven affirming Jesus as his Son. There we have the testimony of God himself. We also have the testimony of God through the witness of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. If we are Christians, we are given an inner witness of the truth and reality of those events by the Holy Spirit. That's what Peter meant when he said in Acts 5:32 that the Holy Spirit (who is given to believers) is a witness to the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus.

In verse 11, John continued by explaining the testimony: It is that God has given us eternal life and that life is in his Son. If you have Jesus, you have life, because Jesus **is** the Life, he **is** eternal life. If you believe the testimony of God - if you trust in Jesus as the Son of God and the one able to save you, then you have that life.

² Psalm 41:9

³ John 13:21-30

⁴ John 17:12

⁵ Barker K.L. & Kohlenberger J., 1994, The NIV Bible Commentary, Hodder & Stoughton, London; page 357

So will we follow truly? Are we committed enough to be saved? On our own, we cannot do it. Jesus said in John 15:5, "If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

So where does our confidence come from that we can follow him? Hear again, Jesus' prayer in the gospel reading. In summary he says,

- That the disciples were given by God the Father to Jesus and he revealed the Father to them.
- They had believed and obeyed his word and believed Jesus came from God.
- He prayed for the Father to protect them from the evil one by the power of God's name. He prayed that God would sanctify them by God's word which is truth.

Surely, he still prays that way for us, for Hebrews 7:25 reads, "Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them."

In John 10, the Good Shepherd passage, Jesus said,

I give them [my sheep] eternal life, and they shall never perish; no-one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no-one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.⁶

No one can snatch you out of the Father's hand or Jesus' hand. You are safe in God's hands.

We heard God described as the heart-knower. He knows my heart and he knows your heart. He knows the good and the bad. He knows the disordered loves of our hearts – good desires which are wrongly prioritised. He knows our hearts. That is what we pray each week:

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden; cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, so that we may truly love you and worthily praise your holy name; through our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

"To whom all hearts are open, all desires known and from whom no secrets are hidden" – that is the heart-knower. The prayer goes back at least to the tenth century. In Latin, it said, "to whom all wishes are eloquent". The wishes, the desires of our hearts speak fluently to him – that's a thought both salutary and encouraging depending on the wishes!

So we ask that he would pour his Holy Spirit into our hearts to cleanse our hearts so that we may love him truly and praise him worthily. It is always dependence on him. We need the Holy Spirit to cleanse our hearts.

Last week, we heard Jesus call the disciples, his friends. Now what is a friend? A quote from the authoress Diana Craik says,

A friend is one to whom one may pour out the contents of one's heart, chaff and grain together, knowing that gentle hands will take and sift it, keep what is worth keeping, and with a breath of kindness, blow the rest away.⁷

If that can be true of the best of human friends, how much more of the one who gave his life for us. Can we trust Jesus like that? Can we pour out our hearts to him, the heart-knower, and trust that he will keep that which is worth keeping and, with the breath of kindness, blow the rest away?

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⁶ John 10:28-29

⁷ Dinah Craik, 1859, "A Life for a Life"