

“When Jesus Disappoints You”

March 24, 2019

Shadow Savior series – 3rd Sunday in Lent

Is Jesus in your winning bracket? I’m not glued to the NCAA Tournament, but the question came to me as I thought about Judas. He wanted Jesus to win. He wanted Jesus to bring the pain to the Romans and get the victory. He wanted Jesus to show himself King. And he was disappointed when Jesus didn’t meet his expectations.

But here’s the thing about Jesus - Jesus will never meet our expectations, but he will always exceed them. That’s the phrase I think about during Lent each year. Jesus will never meet our expectations, but he will always exceed them.

It’s easy to say that as we look at the drama of the Gospel at the other end. We know the full story, but Judas didn’t - and neither did anyone else. Jesus was clear about his mission, but the others didn’t understand it fully. Jesus wouldn’t have been in Judas’ bracket. He wouldn’t have made it to the finals - not the way he was going.

So we keep walking with Jesus and the others into the shadow places - the unclear, uncertain, and sometimes uncomfortable places - trying to consider what it was like to be there and experience it all first-hand. Jesus is our “Shadow Savior” - not always the Savior we want or expect - but the Savior we truly need.

Judas missed the opportunity to understand that. If we’re honest, at the very least, we can relate to his feeling of disappointment. When those we trust or have great confidence in disappoint us, it hurts. When family members or friends let us down, it’s painful. When our expectations aren’t met, we struggle. Judas experienced all of that in his relationship with Jesus.

Maybe Judas’ disappointment had been growing over time. Perhaps he wanted what so many did - someone to rescue the people from suffering under Roman rule. Jesus would bring hope and salvation - but not in the way anyone expected.

Was Judas worried about where he stood in the group of disciples? Did he have the conversations about who was the greatest? Did he have the same ambitions? Was he sick of being treasurer? Was he upset because Jesus had been going around Galilee instead of spending more time in Jerusalem where the action was?

I wonder if he was excited when Jesus got angry at the Temple, made a mess, and made a scene. Frederick Buechner wonders if Judas “had gotten fed up with waiting for Jesus to take the world by storm and hoped that betraying him might force him to show his hand at last.” *Will he fight if I turn him in? Will he start a rebellion like we need? Will he be the Messiah we want?*

Judas wanted Jesus to bring victory by the sword, but Jesus would bring it on the cross. It had been that way all along - going against expectations of even his closest followers and trying to show another way - serving others, drawing the circle wider, going to the places others wouldn't go and to the people others wouldn't associate with.

Consider where Jesus is - at the home of Simon the leper. We're actually told that Jesus is in the home of a leper! Perhaps it's someone he had healed - we don't know - but Jesus' association with this man is clear. He's in the home of someone considered unclean! And then this woman - unnamed in Matthew - pours expensive perfume on Jesus' head.

If we compare this woman and Judas, we can see our own faith struggles. She shows us what it means to live as a disciple; Judas turns against Jesus. The woman shows her love and devotion to Jesus with an extravagant gift - that jar of expensive perfume. She anoints Jesus' head - which can be seen as a sign of royal commissioning, but it's also an act of devotion and a sign of Jesus' impending death.

She prepares him to be buried. She understands who Jesus is - the King who will die. Jesus is the Messiah, and she seems to see and know more than those who have been with him.

Judas, though, seems to be working out of values that aren't the same as Jesus' Kingdom values. Whether it's greed or ambition or impatience, Judas takes initiative to go to priests and ask what they'll give him if he hands Jesus over.

Maybe it's not about the money; perhaps it was "angry disappointment" because Jesus had stirred up the crowd, but was talking about his death instead of making a plan to take over and be king. And if Jesus had, then surely Judas would be close to Jesus in the inner circle. He was the treasurer - trusted, responsible, important.

But Jesus didn't act like Judas expected. Jesus' anger didn't hold up, and he didn't seem to be ready to do anything that would bring the end that Judas wanted. So it was 30 pieces of silver.

SHOW SLIDE: Brick Bible - Judas

Thirty pieces of silver was a cheap price to pay - wages of a shepherd or what you'd get for an injured slave. Just thirty pieces of silver...

What's interesting is that Judas was looking for an opportunity to hand Jesus over - to betray him. N.T. Wright says that betrayal is "like setting deceit to music." Judas is difficult to figure out. Why did he do it? If we delve too deeply into this dark character, the truth is we might find ourselves there. We know the pain of disappointment, especially when it's someone we trust and put our hope in. We know how we might react - what we might do.

After Judas gets the money, Jesus invites the disciples to a meal (keep on reading in Matthew). I imagine Jesus' sorrow was growing, and though he was facing the cross, Judas' betrayal had to be a source of sorrow, too. The others don't know it's Judas when Jesus says that someone will betray him. We know it, but imagine everyone looking around and wondering. They'd been through a lot together - seeing Jesus heal, hearing Jesus teach, agreeing that he was Messiah, and celebrating with the crowds as he came into Jerusalem. Is it I, Lord?

How do we live with unmet expectations? We all have them - with people we love, people we work with, with the world as it is, and even with God. There are so many ways that others don't meet expectations we set for them. And it's easy to get testy and self-righteous about it. *If only he'd do this... If only she'd think about it this way...*

Imagine how the mood started to change and how the questions started to surface when Jesus didn't fulfill the expectations. He was the Messiah they had been waiting for - except he wasn't. He didn't go after power or control of an earthly Kingdom; he brought the Kingdom of God. He came to be a King, but a king who was a servant.

We value power and control and big talk and big promises. We want to be on the winning side. We can see that in every arena. We have expectations - sometimes misplaced - for others to take over and get it done, to win, to make it all right. That's what Judas wanted.

So how do we listen to Jesus - this servant king? Perhaps we know that our ultimate hope doesn't rest in a political candidate or a basketball team or a coach, but sometimes we don't live like that. We don't talk about the hope that we have in Jesus who is Messiah, Jesus who is the Word of God - God in the flesh for the world! The truth is: Jesus will never meet our expectations, but he will always exceed them.

And yet, we want Jesus to follow us. We want to make the rules; we think we know what's best. We want a relationship, but on our own terms. And we get frustrated, too. We think we know what we need. We're sure of what should come next. And when life doesn't happen as we planned, it throws us off. When our expectations aren't met, we're disappointed, and it's easy to blame God. And I want to be clear that we should be honest with God. We need to talk to God about our disappointments and our struggles. God can handle it, and Scripture is full of honest prayers of disappointment.

But there's a bigger challenge, too. We have to consider if we have misplaced expectations when it comes to Jesus. Consider our prayers. "Jesus, if you do this, then

I'll do this..." How many times have we prayed that way? How many times have we bargained and bartered instead of praying, "Thy will be done?"

Consider the question: Who is Jesus? What do his life, ministry, death, and resurrection mean to us? All of this leads to the cross, and we have to face Jesus' death. N.T. Wright says that the Gospel is both compelling and terrifying. And we can see ourselves in Judas and in those who surrounded Jesus - feeling confused, angry, and disappointed.

Perhaps we need to get past our personal agendas when it comes to Jesus. It's easy for us to claim Jesus for ourselves and our agendas rather than committing ourselves to Jesus and following him. It's easy to let our expectations dictate our walk with Jesus rather than allowing Jesus to transform us on the journey.

So how will we keep our focus on who Jesus is and how he loves to the end - how he goes to the cross instead of taking over? By all accounts, as far as Judas was concerned, Jesus was a lost cause. He was disappointing. Would we follow him? If you've filled out a bracket, did you put the underdog in the Final Four? Jesus is the underdog - the last one you'd pick.

And yet we thank God because Jesus will challenge our desire for power and prestige and being right and winning. He challenges us to see how love poured out is powerful, healing, and transformative. He calls us to put aside our expectations and allow him to do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine by God's grace.

Thanks be to God. AMEN.

In this season, we'll be invited to pray and reflect in worship, even writing some reflections if you feel led. As we seek to be honest with God, I ask us to consider these questions:

SHOW SLIDE:

Do you ever feel disappointed by what Jesus says or does (or doesn't say or do)? When have you felt disappointed with Jesus?

What prayers are on your heart today as you offer God the struggles of faith?

Sing "O Lord, Hear My Prayer" (FWS 2200)

Let us pray...PRAYERS of the PEOPLE