

MAUNDY THURSDAY “THE WITNESS OF JUDAS” JOHN 13

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing unto You, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen!

It took three years to complete. It’s one of the most recognized paintings in the world—with its image found on items such as carpets, carvings, and canvases. With life-like facial expressions unable to be captured by anyone else at the time, the 15 x 29-foot painting became an instant masterpiece. I’m talking about *The Last Supper* by the great master Leonardo da Vinci.

When Leonardo da Vinci was forty-three years old, the Duke of Milan asked him to paint this dramatic scene. Da Vinci worked for three years (1495–98) on the assignment, grouping the disciples into threes—two groups on either side of the central figure of Jesus.

When the masterpiece was finished, da Vinci said to a friend, “Look at it and give me your honest opinion.” “It’s wonderful!” exclaimed the friend. “Christ’s chalice is so real I can’t take my eyes off it!” Immediately, da Vinci took a brush and painted over the chalice, exclaiming, “Nothing shall detract from Jesus!”

Nothing shall detract from Jesus! And why is that? Because *Jesus* was betrayed. Let that soak in. *Jesus was betrayed*. The Words of Institution for the Holy Supper begin, “On the night when He was betrayed.” We hear these words so often that we don’t really hear them.

We’re in a series called *Witnesses to Christ*. Today, we meet Judas—Judas Iscariot. And we meet him in the Upper Room the night Jesus was betrayed. “Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me” (John 13:21).

Betrayed by Judas, one of His twelve disciples. Betrayed by Judas for thirty pieces of silver. Betrayed by Judas with a kiss—image that, a kiss! Betrayed by Judas in a garden east of Jerusalem called Gethsemane. Betrayed! That’s why da Vinci exclaimed, “Nothing shall detract from Jesus!” Jesus was betrayed for us.

According to Matthew 26:25, Judas was seated close to Jesus—close enough for the two of them to carry on a private conversation. It may be that the Savior singles out Judas as an important guest. Then Jesus gives Judas a morsel of bread, even while still holding on to his plan to betray Jesus.

“Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him” (John 13:27). The term *Satan* is only used to tell this story in John’s Gospel. This accents the absolute seriousness of the situation. John 6:70 calls Judas a devil, while Mark 5:13 and Luke 8:30 employ the same vocabulary to describe evil spirits entering the Gerasene demoniac.

Da Vinci paints the spilled saltshaker next to the elbow of Judas Iscariot. What for? In Matthew 5:13, Jesus tells His disciples, “You are the salt of the earth.” Judas lost his salt because of greed. We lose our salt because of our greed—our constant lust for more.

The painting depicts the disciples eating herring. In da Vinci’s northern Italian dialect, the word for herring is *renga*. *Renga*—in that dialect—also describes someone who denies religion. Whoa! But Judas isn’t the only sinner present at the Supper. Peter denied Jesus in the high priest’s courtyard. The disciples denied Jesus in Gethsemane. *Renga!* All of them! *Renga!* All of us!

John writes, “After receiving the morsel of bread, he [Judas] immediately went out. And it was night” (John 13:30). It is dark. The whole scene is dark. Jesus warned that night is coming (John 9:4). Night and darkness now come with a vengeance.

Why did Jesus allow all of this to happen? That’s a question we all ask from time to time. I suppose my cat asks the same question when I throw him off the dining room table. We forget our place. And I am not the Creator. But **this** was for you. “For you” are powerful Gospel words! *For*. God is not against you or in opposition to you. God is not your enemy. God is **for** you. And God is for **you**. Not just for her and him, for those and them. God’s love is intensely personal. It is for you!

When we go to a restaurant, the hostess wants to know how many are in our party. Can you imagine going to a restaurant and not knowing how many people are with you? Hostess: “How many are in your party?” Me: “I’m not sure.” Hostess: “How many will be joining you for dinner?” Me: “I don’t know.” When it comes to the Lord’s Supper, how many are in your party? Do you know? Two, for sure. Holy Communion is a table for two! It is personal. Real body and real blood are given for you! And at the same time, Jesus gave himself for the world. You, and I, are joined with the angels and all the saints.

Martin Luther writes, “This is something more than the sermon; for although the same thing is present in the sermon as in the sacrament, here there is the advantage that it is directed at definite individuals.” That’s because Jesus never gives up on you. **You** may give up on you, but Jesus will never give up on you. When soldiers spit in His face, Jesus didn’t give up. When a whip ripped open His back, Jesus didn’t give up. When nails crushed His nerves, Jesus didn’t give up. Come what may, even when we betray and deny Him, Jesus doesn’t give up. *Jesus will never give up on you.*

Did you know that since its completion in 1498, *The Last Supper* has been falling apart? Leonardo da Vinci—always the inventor—tried using new materials for this painting. Instead of using the customary wet plaster, he used dry plaster. The dry plaster worked well artistically, but not well for sustainability. Experts have been working on restoring the original ever since.

How fitting! The Lord’s Supper is for people whose lives, like the painting, are always falling apart. In this life, we never get it right! Thank God we have the Gospel words “for you”!

In the Lord’s Supper, God acts for you—right now. God delivers Christ’s true body and true blood here and now. Holy Communion is the opposite of remembering a dead man. Holy Communion is a meal with a man who lives! Remembering is just a part of it. This is a gift of life, of Jesus himself, the Way, the Truth and the Life.

How so? The word “*is*” in “Take, eat; this is My body” and “Take, drink; this is My blood” means “is.” *Is* doesn’t mean “signifies,” “represents,” or “symbolizes.” This

view didn't arise until the eleventh century. It was promoted by a French theologian named Berengar of Tours, whose watchwords were "flee to reason." I beg your pardon? No. Flee to Scripture! And the words "This is for you!"

A middle-age and slightly overweight Scottish woman walked out from behind a theater curtain. Her hair was going in all different directions, and she was wearing a dress that wasn't very flattering. People in the audience rolled their eyes and let out a collective sigh of disappointment. No one expected anything from this woman. That was the way it was on April 11, 2009, when Susan Boyle began to sing.

After her song, though, people exploded with applause! The video clip of Susan Boyle became the "most-watched" YouTube video at the time. Her first recording broke all sales records. Susan Boyle wasn't what people expected. Susan Boyle was much more!

Here's the point. What may look ordinary can be completely extraordinary. The Lord's Supper is like that. When Christ's words—"Take, eat; this is My body; and take, drink; this is My blood"—are spoken over bread and wine, it's not what we expect. It's so much more! The bread participates with Christ's body! The wine participates with Christ's blood! *What may look ordinary is completely extraordinary.*

But there's more! There's always more in the Gospel. Da Vinci's *The Last Supper* includes a view of heaven. The Lord's Supper is a foretaste of the feast to come. Jesus is coming to restore all things. At the heavenly banquet, we will no longer have to look at our sin. We will be perfect, wearing white robes washed in the blood of Jesus. At the heavenly banquet, we will no longer be sad because of broken hearts and broken lives. In heaven, we will be gathered together with angels, archangels, and all the company of heaven. At the heavenly banquet, we will no longer need Jesus to come to us in the Sacrament. We will see Jesus face-to-face, and He will fill us with unspeakable joy that will never end!

People use a lot of words when they speak about Holy Communion. Words such as *Sacrament* and *Eucharist*. But some of the most important words about Communion are two short words, with three letters each—“for you.”

For you—in the past, Christ died. For you—right now, Christ is present. For you—in the future, you will partake of the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom that will have no end! All for you! Accomplished by Christ’s life, death and resurrection. Received as a gift carried by God’s Word through your ears into your heart, creating the faith that saves you! Amen.

And may the love of God and the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit abide in you to life everlasting.