

Not Just a Gory Story

7th Sun. of Easter – 05/29/22 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Acts 1:12-26 Pastor Keith Besel

vv. 21-22, [Peter says to the followers of Christ upon Judas' gory death,] **“One of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us...one of these men must become with us a witness to His resurrection.”**

Introduction

✘ Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

✘ Verse 18 describes Judas and the way that he took his own life in despair over the fact that he betrayed the Son of God, saying that he fell headlong and “burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out”.

→ That is a pretty gory picture that Scripture paints for us there, isn't it? Why would God allow this kind of thing to find a place in His holy, inspired and perfect Word? And it's not alone. There many other cringe-worthy things in Scripture, like the time that Jael killed the evil army commander, Sisera by driving a tent peg through his temple in Judges 4:18, or when Joseph interpreted the dream of Pharaoh's baker in Genesis 40 as a foreshadowing of the way that he would be beheaded and hanged from a tree and left to have his flesh eaten by birds.

→ Gory stories to be sure, but they are also Bible stories which we all believe (don't we?) as 2 Timothy 3:16 says, that “all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness”.

✘ So, although they may be gory and unpleasant to hear about, this morning I'd like to focus on two important gory stories in Scripture. The first story is the one we have here in our first reading from Acts. And the second is intimately connected to it, although it doesn't explicitly appear in our text today.

→ But understand folks, my purpose is not to shock you or offend you or gross you out. It is to help us all understand why our all-knowing, all-loving God chose to include stories like this in the truth that He has revealed to us in His Word; why they happened in the first place, and what they have to do with us today as the people whom God dearly loves and went to such great lengths to save from sin, death, the devil and hell itself.

I. The death of Judas - not just a gory story.

✘ The tone of things really takes an immediate turn for the followers of Christ here in our text today. They have just experienced a huge spiritual high as the risen Christ taught His disciples, promised them the Holy Spirit, ascended into heaven and they even spoke with angels (vv. 12-13).

→ Now verse 14 says that they are gathered for fellowship, and they are engaging in a time of fervent prayer, when the important issue of Judas' replacement is raised as an obvious matter to address. His office as one of the 12 disciples served as a New Testament representative of one of the 12 tribes of Israel. Someone had to take his place for Christ's messianic mission to be completed to the world through the new Christian Church.

✘ But why the gory details of Judas' death? Well, it keeps us ever-aware that mankind will always face horrible enemies who are thirsty for our blood and eager to rip us away from our Savior at any cost. Martin Luther identified this enemy as the “evil trinity” – one enemy with three heads.

- The first part of the “evil trinity” is Satan: the ultimate insidious instigator behind the traitorous actions of Judas. Luke 22:3 tells us that “Satan entered into Judas”, making Judas the human enemy; the willing instrument of Jesus’ archenemy, the devil himself.
- The second head of the “evil trinity” is sin. 1 John 3:8 tells us that “the devil has been sinning from the beginning”. He who tempted Judas to sin was the one who brought sin into the world in the first place and he continues to wreak destruction against God and His creation, as 1 John 3:8 also says, “whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil”. So, the equation is simple: if you sin, you have connected yourself to Satan.
- So #1 is Satan, #2 is sin and the third part of the evil trinity is death. Romans 6:23 finishes off the equation by showing us the outcome of our sinful connection to Satan. It says “the wages of sin is death”. Once sin entered the world, death soon followed as we see Adam and Eve’s son Cain slaughter his brother Abel. Throughout the pages of Scripture there are gruesome examples of wholesale death brought about because of man’s sinful nature and his submission to the devil’s schemes. We see it in the flood, at Sodom and Gomorrah and on and on. You can’t make death look pretty or okay. It is ours and God’s ultimate enemy. This is why Judas’ death is portrayed in gory terms.
- ✘ But there is one more component to this three-headed enemy of Satan, sin, and death. It is the reality of the final judgement and penalty, the place we call hell. Tragically, Judas suffered not only a horrible physical death but he also met the most horrific fate imaginable: eternal death and separation from God in hell, with its unthinkable spiritual and physical sufferings. Mark 9:48 describes it as the place “where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched”. Jesus Himself refers to Judas as “the son of destruction” in John 17:12 and confirms there that Judas “has been lost” forever. So yes, the very real place called hell serves as a sober warning against sin for all of us, even today. Many work hard to avoid thinking of or talking about hell, but friends we cannot deny or avoid that it is taught in the Bible.
- ✘ So, you see, this story of Judas’ horrible death snaps us out of any false, fairy-tale view of life we might have. It is necessary and important for our salvation to be reminded that these same enemies work every day to wreak havoc in our world, the church, and our own lives.
 - As far as this world, “history shows how great and powerful the devil’s kingdom is” (AP II 49). Examples of Satan’s work are more than we could ever count.
 - In the Church, even as we rejoice to see how God guides His newborn Church in the New Testament, we also see in the pages of Scripture, as well as the Church today, abundant illustrations of Satan hard at work to undermine God’s life-giving mission through and among His people.
 - And for each one of us in our own lives the words of 1 Peter 5:8 serve as a most important warning, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour”. That places before us all quite the “gory” picture of Satan’s desire to rip us all to shreds and gulp us down!

II. The death of Jesus - a gory yet glorious story.

- ✘ I think we do ourselves a disservice sometimes by the way that we talk about Jesus’ suffering, crucifixion and death only as a glorious saving event, for if you pay attention to the details, it is also one of the goriest stories in all of Scripture.
 - Now some may think it is inappropriate – even heretical – to “compare” Judas’ and Jesus’ gory deaths together. But the truth is that they have a number of things in common. And these

features of commonality actually gives us a handle for seeing how utterly and completely different these two deaths are in their nature, their purpose, and what they mean for us today.

✘ To begin, where we end with each of these is quite different. Where the death of Judas frightens and horrifies us, the death of Jesus gives us ultimate comfort, consolation, and salvation.

➔ Yet it's interesting as we start with what is common between them that both Jesus and Judas died on a tree. Matthew 27:5 tells us that Judas hung himself in a field – presumably from a tree, while today's text in Acts gives us the rest of the "gory story" after the rope gave way and his body fell. Acts 5:30 tells us that Jesus was "hung...on a tree" which we know of course was a cross.

- BUT the tree on which Judas died by his own hand is nothing more than a tree of death. It serves as a symbol of hopelessness and guilt and despair while the tree on which Jesus died has become a tree of life for all who look to Him to be saved. His is actually a glorious tree for all who believe, just as that very bad Friday on which Jesus suffered and died is now celebrated by us as Good Friday.

➔ Another point of commonality is that both Jesus and Judas died gory, bloody deaths. In the case of Judas, verse 18 says that "falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out". It was for this reason, and because of the "blood money" that Judas received because he agreed to betray Jesus that the Jewish leaders had to come up with a use for the 30 coins that Judas threw back at them in the temple. So they purchased a piece of ground to bury not only Judas, but the poor as well and they named it "Field of Blood."

- BUT Judas' gory death simply makes us want to "turn away" in sadness, revulsion and disgust, while the blood spilled out by Jesus, according to 1 John 1:7 "cleanses us from all sin". Hebrews 9:22 also says that "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins". So rather than turning our eyes away from the cross, we fix our eyes upon it as the means for our salvation. We even rejoice to receive of His precious blood along with His body in, with, and under bread and wine for our forgiveness, strength and salvation today and forever.

✘ Another one, both Jesus and Judas died gory deaths in fulfillment of Scripture. Though we may never fully understand these mysteries, Peter says in verse 16 that "the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas".

- BUT we also believe and confess with great joy and thanksgiving in the Nicene Creed that Jesus lived, suffered, was crucified, buried, rose again, and ascended into heaven for us "according to the Scriptures". So, if the death of Judas is "not just a gory story," how much more is this true of the death of Jesus, whose gory story is truly a glorious story for us who follow Paul by preaching "Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles" (1 Cor. 1:23). 1 Corinthians 2:7-8 says that Jesus' crucifixion was decreed by God "before the ages for our glory". His bloody sacrifice is the ultimate fulfillment of all Old Testament prophecies, including the thousands of bloody sacrifices in the Old Testament.

✘ Finally, both Jesus and Judas were abandoned, forsaken, and deserted in their deaths. Peter quotes Psalm 69:5 in verse 20 of our text as a prophecy pointing to Judas' death: "May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it". Because he turned his back on Jesus, Judas, like all those who die without true repentance and faith ended up utterly alone, and tragically will face eternity separated from God.

- BUT while Jesus was abandoned and forsaken as He hung on the tree – both by His disciples, but more importantly by His own Father (Mk. 15:34), His being left alone now serves as a source of infinite comfort for us. Why? It's because Jesus was forsaken by His Father in our place, as He took our sin upon Himself so that we now have God's absolute promise that He will never leave us nor forsake us (Heb. 13:5; Rom. 8:31–39).

Conclusion

- ✘ So, the bottom line is this: the gory death of Judas reminds us all of our horrific enemies: Satan, sin and death, as well as the reality that we all “deserve” to land eternally in hell.
 - ➔ BUT the gory, yet glorious death of Jesus assures us all that our bloodthirsty enemies have been vanquished forever! This was God’s plan; Jesus’ purpose and the intention of God’s grace for you and me and all people.
 - ➔ 1 John 3:8 says, “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil”. And 1 John 1:7 assures us, “The blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin”. Yes, the gory death of Jesus allows you and me to taunt death, hell, sin, and Satan with the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:54-57, “Death is swallowed up in victory.’ ‘O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”.
- ✘ This, you see, is the witness that the disciples, including Judas’ replacement, must make sure to continue. It is the witness that we too must continue to proclaim as Jesus’ disciples today; that Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia! Amen.*