

BLOOD MONEY

Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests and asked, “What are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to you?” So they counted out for him thirty pieces of silver. 16 From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over.

Blood money. That’s what you call it when someone gets paid for conspiring in someone else’s murder. The money they get, figuratively speaking is stained, tarnished, disgraced, reddened because of the way it was earned: through treachery and betrayal. I’ve been binge watching the old TV show, *The Sopranos*, about the mafia and its evil, and blood money is a common theme. A gun for hire -- at the right price.

And here we see it in our text. Judas, one of Jesus’ disciples, gives Him up to His enemies for thirty pieces of silver -- blood money -- and he even does so with the devious and despicable kiss of friendship.

30 pieces of silver is considered to be worth between five weeks and as much as four months wages. A significant sum, but hardly a gold mine.

You have to wonder. What was it like in the mind of Judas, as he debated this act? How did he rationalize it? Was it really about the money? Was he that greedy? Or had he somehow become disillusioned with Jesus -- frustrated with His journeys -- angry at the Lord’s refusal to capitalize on the miracles, the glory, the fame? Instead talking about generosity, self-sacrifice, forgiveness, and grace.

Whatever the case may be, it is clear that the Devil had gained a foothold in this young man and led him gently down this path until he finally yielded to his urges and initiated the conversation with the chief priests. And soon enough, the deed was done -- for blood money.

And what about them -- the chief priests? How did they rationalize this move to cause the death of Jesus? Would they have admitted that it was about pride, jealousy, fear, hatred? Would they have acknowledged that this was a heinous act, a criminal act, a sinful act? Or would they have somehow couched it under the rationalization that they were doing it to honor God -- to be rid of a blasphemer, a pretender, an evil one?

Again, we don't know the details -- and perhaps it was different for each one. But, in the end, the Evil One had his way with these men and led them down the road of perdition. Perhaps easier because they had one another to spew lines of justification, of logic, or "the greater good." They could jump on the bandwagon and excuse themselves from treachery. But Jesus' blood was on their hands too. If Judas was the recipient of blood money, they were the givers.

We sinful humans are good at excuses, aren't we? It's so easy for us to turn our back on the will and ways of God to live for ourselves, to give in to our passions, to sacrifice principle for pleasure, faith for funding, integrity for improvement to our status, our bank account, our way of life. And to do it with a good old dose of creative mental manipulation to our conscience.

But tonight let's own up to it. On your way in you received a red nickel. It stands for the Tempter's blood money for you. That is, the many ways he has deceived you into sacrificing the Savior's ways for his own by decorating them in ways that appeal to the selfish, sinful nature. The ways he has led you down the road of Judas, encouraging you to betray your Lord and your fellow man or woman for your own promotion.

Was it a job deal where you sacrificed a co-workers good name to get ahead?

Was it a rumor that just had to be spread so that you got to participate in the conversation?

Was it a lie to cover up dishonesty, an excuse to cover up a personal indiscretion, a rationalization for anger, hatred, mistreatment of another?

Has your love for God been eclipsed by your love for someone else? Has kindness been clouded by jealousy -- generosity for advancement -- compassion for compensation?

You know your Achilles heel. You may have been struggling with it for many, many years -- even as Judas likely dealt with greed and dishonesty for far longer than the three years he was with Jesus.

But tonight, Jesus says to you.

"Come, ... come with your blood money in hand. Come with your contradictions, your treacheries, your dark secrets and hidden indiscretions. Come with your sins, your lies, your lusts, your evils. Because, believe it or not, you are still welcome to the table. And I want to offer you, in place of the blood money, my true body and my true blood, given

and shed on the cross of Calvary for the forgiveness of sins. For, you see, I didn't come to condemn and destroy. I came to forgive and renew. And I want to reclaim you as my own -- I want to turn you away from that old, unfaithful self, and, because of my death for you, enable you to become a new person.

My disciple, Judas, ran away from the table clinging to his blood money, determined to go his own way, to do the deed that had claimed his heart, to yield to the Tempter's urgings and surrender himself to unfaithfulness.

He didn't have to. And you don't have to. Because my body and blood offer you a way out -- repentance, forgiveness, faith. So come. Lay down your blood money and taste my forgiveness.

Isn't it amazing that our Lord, in His Holy Supper, would offer Himself to those very men who would fall asleep in His hour of need, forsake Him in His time of trial, run away from Him when confronted with the weapons of the soldiers, and deny Him when challenged by the crowds?

And isn't it just as amazing that He opens up His hands to sinners like us, who each day, if honesty prevails, must repeat the same words:

Most merciful God, I confess that I am by nature sinful and unclean. I have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what I have done and by what I have left undone. I have not loved You with my whole heart; I have not loved my neighbor as myself. I justly deserve Your present and eternal punishment. For the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me. Forgive me, renew me, and lead me, so that I may delight in Your will and walk in Your ways to the glory of your Holy Name. Amen.

Yet He is here, as Host at the table. "Take, eat, this is my body. Take drink, this is my blood, given and shed for YOU for the forgiveness of all your sins."

So come and make the great exchange. Your blood money for His precious blood. Your guilt for His forgiveness.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.