

Sermon about John 13, 21-30 on Invocavit 2021 in BXL (III^N)

Blessing: The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (Amen.)

Bible: (21) After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his spirit, and testified, “Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.” (22) The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he spoke. (23) One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining at table at Jesus’ side, (24) so Simon Peter motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. (25) So that disciple, leaning back against Jesus, said to him, “Lord, who is it?” (26) Jesus answered, “It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it.” So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. (27) Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, “What you are going to do, do quickly.” (28) Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. (29) Some thought that, because Judas had the moneybag, Jesus was telling him, “Buy what we need for the feast,” or that he should give something to the poor. (30) So, after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.

Prayer: In Your name, O crucified Lord Jesus Christ, we have gathered here today to remember Your deed for us. You suffered the all-painful death on the trunk of the holy cross as the true, patient, sacrificial Lamb for us. Rule our hearts by Your Holy Spirit, refreshing them with the heavenly dew of Your grace. Preserve us with Your divine love and hide us – body and soul – in Your holy wounds. O faithful Saviour, Jesus Christ, our only solace, hope, and life. (Amen.)

Sermon: *Opening – where we are in the story:* At the beginning, we first jump forward almost to the end of the story. The series of the readings for Lent work a bit like a good novel, let’s say a crime thriller. It starts with a scene shortly before the climax. As readers or spectators, we can feel the tension and gravity

right from the first minute. Afterwards, we jump back to the beginning, see how it all began, how the story developed and why it happened that way and then we are full of expectation how the story continues after the climax and how the problem will be solved at the end.

Today, at the beginning of Lent, with this passage from John, it is the same. We see Jesus and his disciples already in Jerusalem, on the eve of Passover, one of the highest feasts of the Jews when they commemorate the release of the people of Israel out of the slavery in Egypt. When the day starts, according to old and Biblical custom at sundown, families come together for the ritual evening meal with different symbolic foods, with unleavened bread and a chalice of wine. Also Jesus has come to Jerusalem with his “family”, his disciples. Shortly before, Jesus had washed the feet of his disciples at the entrance. They have gathered in a rented room to celebrate supper – it shall become a holy supper for them. – The workshop of Lucas Cranach, the famous painter of the Reformation and

friend of Martin Luther, imagined it this way . It is the central panel of the Reformation altarpiece of the city church St. Mary in Wittenberg. Some of the people on the altarpiece can be identified as famous people of that time. For example, the disciple who receives a cup from the servant, has Martin Luther's face. To his left we see his printer Hans Lufft, who printed the first Bible in Luther's translation. The table is open to the left side and



therewith invites the observer to join the Holy Supper. In the background we see

a mighty oak, a symbol for life, and a fortress like the castle of Wittenberg on a rock, the mount Zion: a mighty fortress is our God.

Part 1 – It is me who is meant: Now, Jesus reveals to his 12 disciples that one of them will betray him. – The disciples are startled and troubled. They cannot understand. Who of them could be capable of doing such a terrible thing? On the picture we see a shocked Simon Peter asking: Could it be me? – They want to know more details. Peter prompts the disciple “whom Jesus loved” (the tradition sees in him John the Evangelist) to ask Jesus, because he sits next to him. Obviously, he is closer to his master. Jesus’s answer is quite clear. For us readers, listeners, spectators, the scene is clear: Judas was meant. – Strangely, the other 11 do not seem to understand. At the latest from this moment on, the scene opens and shines through to the congregation, to us. If we would remain standing and glancing at Judas and philosophise how the others could not understand why Judas did it, who is responsible, we would miss the crucial part of the story, the part when we are involved. – “Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.” – The threat does not lurk outside. Not the world, the society, the many atheists or cold Christians, not the Muslims among us are the threat for me and my faith. The threat is inside the Church. It is sitting next to me at the table of the Lord. It is inside me. It is me who is meant.

We see Judas in the picture. His left foot is already on the go, ready to leave the community. In the moment he is fed by Jesus with the bread, Satan – the evil – overcomes him. Good and bad, life and death, sin and righteousness are often very close to each other. – Even the attendance at the Lord’s table here cannot protect me fully from sinning and getting lost. What will I do after Jesus has fed me here with His body and blood? Judas receives the supper and leaves the circle immediately out into the night. “By his departure Judas Iscariot removes himself from the “light of the world” (John 8, 12; 9, 5) and traps into the godless

darkness.”¹ – It is a terrible story about sin. About what sin brings about. It is in a way the New Testament counterpart of the narrative of the Fall, from Genesis 3, which we have heard as Old Testament Reading today.

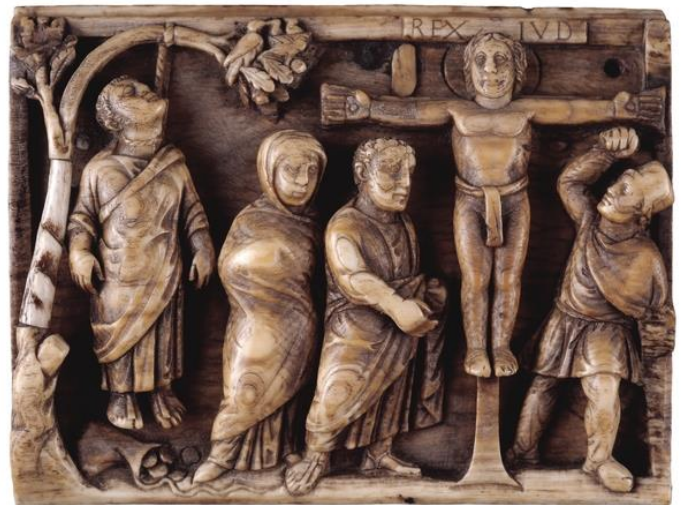
Part 2 – Terrible – but necessary: Some would now say: Judas is not responsible. It was Satan. – It was not me. – Again, we have the words of the Old Testament Reading in the ear (Gen 3, 12+13): “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.” “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.” The sanctuary of Saint John’s church in Oberursel, near Frankfurt in Germany, next to our Lutheran seminary, is lined inside with glazed tiles. All tiles are unique, made by an artist especially for this church. On one side of the church the tiles form the word “Crucify!”, with an exclamation mark – the cry of the mob in front of Pilate who is sentencing Jesus. And if you follow along the word “Crucify!” the very next tile is made like a mirror. You see your own face in it. It is you who shouts “Crucify!” by committing sin. I am responsible for what happens at the Cross. – The problem is always the same: I try to enforce heaven on earth. I decide to spring into action myself. And therewith to eliminate God. Why does God not heal me? Why am I so poor? Why could God permit this or that? God is so unfair! – And Judas maybe seemed to think: Jesus must reveal himself as Messiah, he must start fighting against the Romans. – This opinion about God, all the complaints and questions about life stay inside the world and time. But Jesus is from the eternity. He came to redeem us from the things who let us cling to the ground. - “What you are going to do, do quickly.”, says Jesus. What Judas did was terrible, but in this case apparently necessary. The other Evangelists use the small but very important Greek word “dei”. This means something must be, must be done. There is no alternative. – Judas was a part of the history of salvation. - Has Judas been redeemed? We do not know. The words of our Lord about him weigh gravely. If it would go according to human rules,

¹ Johannes Block. Predigtmeditation über Joh 13, 21-30. In: GPM #75/2. Göttingen 2021. Seite 206.

there would be no hope for him. But it is according to God's way. Judas is the symbolic figure for the crisis in which everyone will be at least once in a lifetime. It is the crisis to decide if I cling to Jesus, if I to stay in the circle of the community around the Lord's table which means to accept God as my only Lord or to decide to follow the world, to stay in the shallows of life and to turn away from God or to try to enforce God's promise to redeem me right now in this time and world.

Reverberation – Hope is still alive: At the end Jesus remains the sovereign about everything. He commands Judas and he lets him act. Life overcame death. After Good Friday it became Easter. The space of salvation, the Church is still alive and will stay alive until the Lord comes again to accomplish the mission. Stay here in this community! – For the first ancient Christians it was not so clear at all that Judas was condemned as it was for later generations. On one of the oldest and first pictures of the Cross we see also Judas.

It is an ivory plate, one of a sample of four from a sarcophagus from around the year 430. On the right side we see Jesus, glorious and alive, his eyes open, his head raised to heaven. On the other side, we see Judas. Hanged at a tree, dead, alone, but on the same height as Jesus and turned to him.



And on the tree is a bird's nest. A bird is feeding its baby birds. A strong symbol of new life. – Hope is still alive. Sin and death will not have the last word. One of the last words will be: “This is my body, given for you into death. This is my blood, shed for the forgiveness of all your sins.”

Blessing: The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.