Ash Wednesday
Bessemer - Ironwood 1958
W Henrietta - 1961
Rolling Meadows - 1963

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

Matt. 10: 4b Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him.

JUDAS

I, Judas, am a man well to be remembered -- remembered not for my nobility of character, not for any heroic deed, not for my strong faith; but remembered because I was the man who betrayed the Christ. Mine is the story of deepest tragedy. I was a man who lived close to heaven, but ended in hell. I was a man who abused the privilege of ~~apostleship~~ discipleship and made of the highest opportunity a frightful calamity. Every time my name is mentioned the warning signals begin to flash throughout earth and sky ~~with a brilliance more radiant than the northern lights~~: Beware! The people of your day have a pet name for me. They call me The devil incarnate. I am still the target of some of the most vehement and heartless denunciations. The worst of you throw stones at me.

But listen to my story and try to remember -- if you can -- that I was ~~only human~~ a man - like you. I acted like a ~~human being~~ man; and what I did any man is capable of doing, even you! When I was born at Kerioth centuries ago, my parents loved me dearly and thanked the God of Israel for the precious gift. I know, because they picked for me the finest of names. They called me Judas which means Praise of God. It would have broken their hearts to have known that one day Christ would speak of me and say, It had been better for that man if he had not been born.

I was reared like the other boys in Judea, taught to know and to believe in the God of our fathers. As I grew to adulthood I developed a deep interest in spiritual matters. Then came the greatest day of my life. The prophet of Nazareth invited me: Follow me! This set me on the path that leads to the heights, to heaven. Perhaps that puzzles you. You cannot understand why Christ chose a man like me to be an Apostle. But permit me to reverse the question. Why did He choose you as a follower? God does not look at what a man is, but at what, by grace, he may become. Christ saw that I had glorious possibilities. With the best and happiest of intentions I forsook all and followed Him. For over two years I

lived with Him; I heard His matchless sermons; I witnessed His divine miracles. But when they killed Him and He left earth for heaven, I killed myself and went to hell.

Let me tell you how it happened. Listen carefully, for mine is a prime example of how a single passion can kill a man's soul. My fall was not a chance happening of an evening; it was a creeping development. My master passion was greed and, since I was treasurer for our small group, temptation visited me often. We had little in our coffers, but one day some of it stuck to my fingers and fell into my pocket. As you count sin in your world it was only a little sin. I did not bother to call it sin. Some day I would pay it back, I quietly told myself; and if I did not, the insignificant amount I had taken wouldn't matter much anyway. When you want to sin, the devil is ready to suggest an excuse with which to conceal your baseness even from yourself. As I look back now, I wish I had been caught the first time I stole. If I had, my story might have been written differently. When you get caught at a sin, thank God for it. The sins you get away with harden you and curse you doubly, today and tomorrow. They are the sins you try again. As time went on I stole more often and larger amounts and with less compunction.

Don't think that I wasn't warned. Now that it is past the admonitions of Christ sound clear and strong to me like a fog horn in the stillness of the night. There was the time He was speaking to us disciples and to the multitude: Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. For there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known. . . . Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. His warnings were like tracer bullets aimed at me. Never say God does not warn you in your sin. You ignore His admonition until the day after the fall, and then you look back and wail: How could I have been so blind and deaf!

My story also shows that sin grows like a cancer. It may begin with a single passion, but gradually it contaminates and perverts the entire self. The joy I at first experienced in the companionship of the Apostles gave way to fear that they would eventually discover my dishonesty. The love I had for Christ, when I began to follow Him, turned to ~~bitter hatred~~ a feeling of uneasiness as His perfection became an ever-present rebuke. I realized that He who knew the thoughts of the Samaritan woman could likewise read the secrets in my heart. Slowly but ever so surely I became a complete hypocrite.

I remember the meal in the home of Simon the leper. Mary anointed Christ with precious ointment. I objected most vehemently to the waste and suggested that the ointment should have been sold and the money given to the poor. My thought was that I could have done the distribution, some of it to myself. When Christ praised Mary for her devotion, it was too much. I went to the priests and made the damnable agreement to sell Him into death for one-third the amoung Mary had spent for the ointment.

In one of His sermons Christ took an imaginary scale. On one arm He piled all the wealth of the world, its gold and jewels, its mountains and lakes, its factories and homes. On the other arm He laid a single soul. The scale moved. The soul was of greater value. What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? I took a scale too. On one arm I placed the divine Lord, my soul and its eternal destiny. On the other arm I put thirty pieces of silver, less than twenty dollars in your money, the price of the meanest slave. My perverted scale moved -- in the other direction. I thought the money had greater value.

I remember the meal in the upper room. I was there with my traitorous plans pounding in my black heart. Nothing so corrupts a heart as the plan for a sin. Christ was still warning me: One of you which eateth with me shall betray Me. I had to play the hypocrite right down to the end! With the puzzled Apostles I asked, Lord, is it I? He was still loving and considerate. Instead of pointing

at me and saying in righteous anger Yes! He replied softly, He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it. He dipped it and gave it to me.

Now my story runs quickly to its terrible end. It comes back to me like a terrifying dream. I had led the mob to the garden and was about to betray Christ with the usual greeting of a kiss. It was not easy! As I looked into His face I half expected Him to damn me right there and then. But all I saw in that face was love and pain. Friend, He said. Think of it; He still called me friend! Friend, wherefore art thou come? He knew, but He wanted me to put the betrayal into words and to see where my damnable greed was driving me. Instead, I kissed Him!

With that, my world crashed! A horro swept over me, which, pray God, you may never know. The enormity of my guilt overwhelmed me. Sin looks so different after it has been committed! In temptation it is appealing, like red wine sparkling in a glass; in its accomplished act sin stings like an adder.

Scarcely knowing what I did, I sat down that dark night and looked out the window of the past. The scenes of my association with Christ tumbled through my mind in a tumult of confusion. It began happily, Follow Me! but ended tragically, Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss? Christ's sermon kept ringing in my ears: Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also... No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to one, and despise the other, and in my pocket the silver coins began to jingle. -- The warning of Christ, One of you shall betray me, and the satanic smile of Caiaphas when I asked, What will you give me? -- The song of the children on Sunday, Hosanna to the Son of David, and the foul threats of an unprincipled mob. -- Christ washing our feet and my tasting of the sop.

The money jingled uneasily in my pocket. It suggested a last desperate action. I went to those with whom I had conspired, I have sinned, I pleaded, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. But they only looked at me in cold and scornful indifference, What is that to us? they said with a smirk; See thou to that. That was too much. I took the money in my trembling hands and hurled

into the temple. But even this did not relieve me. Sin is marked on the soul and you cannot throw it away with your hands. You cannot touch the sin that has been committed, not even with penitence and tears. Only God can take it away.

Never go to the world with your confession of sin. It has no concern for sin and no interest in confession. It will only be amused. Rather go to Him who invites, Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. It is my tragedy that I did not go.

For a fatal moment I stood at the last great crossroads. To the right was Jerusalem and the loving Christ. Peter went there and found the peace of forgiveness. I did not find it, not because God refused me, but because I did not ask for it. I took the road to the left. It led to a tree in the valley, death by my own hand, and hell without end.

Before I leave, allow me one word more. I was not the last suicide. On the average day more than sixty die in your country by their own hand. They are among the world's most misunderstood people. My heart goes out to them. The best advice I can give them is that they do what I neglected to do. Let them tell their trouble to God and let them discuss their problem with a strong Christian friend or pastor to be assured of God's loving forgiveness.

My trouble was that I could think only of my sin. You can never think too harshly of your sin; but when you think of it alone, it will drive you to despair. You remember the story of the Prodigal Son. As the wretch sat among the swine, he thought not only of his sorry plight; he thought of the love of his father. I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee. You who are driven to despair over your sin, go home. Go to your heavenly Father and say, I have sinned. Forgive me for Jesus' sake. This I didn't do, and mine was a tragic end. Remember me, Judas, 'Praise of God,' who also betrayed Christ. Remember me, and be warned lest you, too, make of your life a like tragedy! Amen.