

12A

RELIGION

Judas' act
part of
God's plan

Sunday

School Lesson

Devotional reading: Matthew
27:1-10.Lesson scripture: Matthew
26:14-16, 20-25, 47-50, 27:1-5.

Today's lesson concerns Judas—a sobering example of someone who seemed to possess the ultimate advantage and still went wrong. We wonder how anyone who had walked so long as a close friend of Jesus could betray him.

It is important for us to understand what occurred in Judas' case and why so many choose the same path today. Such tragedies as his are possible because all people have freedom of will—the freedom to make their own choices for good or evil. A chain of wrong choices will lead to disaster, and in some cases the impact of that disaster is experienced during a person's earthly life. Even the most mature Christian must not let down his guard for a moment, lest he find himself asking, "What went wrong?"

Some may ask, "Did Judas really have a choice?" Was he little more than a puppet on a string? We must address this issue before proceeding to the lesson text. Among the numerous Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament was the prediction that Jesus would be betrayed. Zechariah prophesied the amount of thirty pieces of silver and added that this sum would be given to the potter (11:12,13). Long before it even entered Judas' heart to do so, Jesus knew that Judas would betray Him and called him a devil, though without naming him explicitly (John 6:64, 70, 71). According to today's lesson text, Jesus revealed to Judas that He knew what he intended to do (Matthew 26:25). But knowing what a person will do is not the same as causing him to do it.

It is probable that Judas was not always a betrayer. We assume that when Jesus chose the twelve, Judas possessed a faith, zeal, and trust that was similar to that of the other disciples. However, as soon as Jesus chose these men, Satan began to look for ways to destroy them. He attacked them all by appealing to their pride, fear, lust for power, and greed. In one case, that of Judas Iscariot, he succeeded.

Some may ask why Jesus did not choose someone else who would have been spiritually stronger than Judas. It does not appear to be God's policy to prevent us from sinning by keeping us from tempting situations, even when He knows that we will fall. Though He promises not to allow us to be tempted to the point that we have no chance of resisting (1 Corinthians 10:13), the Lord still requires us to make our own choices, and we all sometimes fail. Step by step, through his own choices, Judas came to the terrible decision to betray his Master.

At the same time, God's sovereignty should not be overlooked. He knew in advance that Judas would become a traitor, and inspired His prophets to record some of the details of the betrayal. Jesus was fully aware that He would be betrayed. These facts tell us that God was not surprised, nor were His plans thwarted or altered by Judas' actions (see John 13:18, 19). Jesus' eventual arrest and crucifixion were part of the "determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23).

It is impossible for us to know exactly what happened to Judas' heart to change him from one of the loyal twelve to a betrayer.



PHOTOS/SUE ANN JOHNSON

An earth mover brings down the wall of an abandoned building in the Reid Community. Efforts to demolish the 60 year old building were lead by residents and clergy.

And the walls came tumbling down

By Jeri Young
THE CHARLOTTE POST

The Rev. Kenneth Alexander, pastor of Mount Moriah Baptist Church, believes if the clergy unite, the community will follow.

He had proof of that on Monday.

About 75 people cheered as the walls of an abandoned, condemned building in Belmont's Reid community tumbled down.

The building stood across from Alexander's church and its neighbor Love's Chapel Presbyterian Church.

"It let people know that we as clergy are as concerned about the community," Alexander said. "And it let everyone know that we are not going to take it any more."

The building, at one time a theater, had become a haven for drug dealers and addicts. Prostitutes could often be found lurking in its shadows. Residents watched in shock as they watched the building and several others turn their quiet street into one where strangers were to be feared.

"It had affected our children," Reid resident James Miller said. "People were afraid to walk up and down the street. People would stop to buy drugs. Drugs had even infiltrated our park."

Miller, a retired principal who has lived in the area for almost 50 years, serves as co-chairman of Belmont Youth Counseling Service. He has seen change in the community over the years. Problems like alcohol, drugs and teenage pregnancy had destroyed families and lives.

"We found that parents were having the problems," Miller said. "We brought in people to talk to the kids and help them straighten out their lives, but the source was still there."

An act of kindness

Residents had long wanted to do something about the building, but cost prevented them from purchasing it.

The problem was solved earlier this year when an anonymous donor bought the building. The person, a member of First Presbyterian Church, then deeded it to Love's Chapel.

"The person knew of our plight," Miller, a member of Love's Chapel said. "The person wanted to help us get it torn down."

"We were happy to get it," Love's Chapel pastor Michael Robinson said. "For years the community was trying to get something done about it. Some of our members had tried to purchase it for years. What happened was nothing short of a miracle and the grace of God and the willingness of people to give."

The church voted to tear down the building. The lot will be used to ease parking problems for the church.

Monday's service marked the birth of a renewed community and the Belmont Reconciliation Task Force, a group of concerned clergy of several denominations and races who have dedicated themselves to finding Christian solutions to community problems.

"The Task Force will address problems," Alexander said. "We will do it not only on this corner, but all over the city."

The group was born from weekly clerical meetings held at First Presbyterian. Ministers would get together to fellowship, share and brainstorm.

"We are concerned with the total community," Alexander said. "We want good community relations. The church is the perfect place to start."

The group hopes to acquire other properties and repeat the services held Monday.

"We met as a group of ministers in the community," Robinson said. "We came up with the theme 'The Walls Come Tumbling Down.' The walls symbolize the division coming down in our churches and neighborhoods."

In the meantime, neighbors see the event as a way of making the community a little safer.

"We've had our problems with our neighborhood," Robinson said. "Through or meeting we have come up with a way to make our city better. Our neighborhood is not as bad as could be and not as good as it used to be."

Miller agrees. "We still have a lot to do," Miller said. "But we are delighted. People don't have to be afraid to walk the street at night or come to church."



A crowd of 75 looks on as the building, which was once a church, is demolished. The lot will be used for parking for local churches.

Four more
join flap
over rebel
capital flag

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CHARLESTON, S.C. — The leaders of four major South Carolina denominations have renewed efforts to bring Christians together at a time of concern about racism and controversy about the Confederate flag.

"With the issues that we face in South Carolina, I don't think there has ever been a time when the Christian churches need to demonstrate more unity and support for each other," said Bishop Edward L. Salmon Jr. of the Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina.

Salmon was joined by leaders of three other denominations Sunday for the meeting of the LARCUM Covenant — a discussion group of leaders from the Lutheran, Anglican, Roman Catholic and United Methodist churches.

The four denominations agreed last year to a common baptismal certificate and leaders met Sunday to continue their quest for unity.

The churches have been working for social as well as theological unity. The names of many of their clergy appeared in newspaper ads statewide Sunday urging reconciliation on the issue of the Confederate flag, which flew above the Statehouse, but which Gov. David Beasley wants to move to a memorial on Statehouse grounds.

"Lutherans have always been concerned and have always been a strongly ecumenically minded church," said Bishop David Donges of the South Carolina Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

"LARCUM has made some significant steps," said Bishop Dorsey Henderson, of the Episcopal Diocese of Upper South Carolina. "The fact that these denominations can come and agree on a common baptismal certificate is very exciting."

Bishop David Thompson of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Charleston said divisions among the churches is the work of the devil.

"Lucifer divided heaven," he said. "We can't be surprised that he's divided us here on Earth ... the prayer of Christ is for unity and Christ's prayer is not going to be frustrated."

Methodist Bishop Lawrence McCleskey could not attend, but was represented by the Rev. Steve Holler, the pastor of Armenia United Methodist Church in Chester.

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"It's the last thing one would expect from Kareem Abdul Jabbar, to do something with Coors," said Jodeh, whose organization represents 20,000 Muslims. "What was he thinking of?"

Abdul Jabbar Coors ads offend Muslims

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

GOLDEN, Colo. — The Islamic Society of North America has condemned NBA Hall of Famer Kareem Abdul Jabbar's appearance in a Coors beer ad and wants him to renounce it.

Sayyid M. Syeed, secretary general of the Plainfield, Ind.-based society, called Abdul Jabbar's appearance in the television spot "devastating."

Alcohol is prohibited in Islam, he said.

Abdul Jabbar, a devout

Muslim, makes a cameo appearance in the Golden brewery's ad campaign, which began Jan. 1.

The former NBA star joins a group of men cavorting in the snow-covered Rockies. They cut out a hole in the clouds for a basketball hoop.

The ad is part of a series that shows young, giant-sized people bounding over snowy peaks, playing volleyball or some other sport.

Syeed has called on Abdul

Jabbar to ask Coors to drop the ad or donate his compensation to institutions that fight alcohol use.

"Alcohol is totally prohibited in Islam," he said. "Not only the drinking of alcohol but shipping, serving or promoting alcohol, or participating in feasts or parties where alcohol is served. All these are bad."

Coors spokesman Dave Taylor said there have been no complaints about the commercial.

"I would think Abdul Jabbar knows the parameters of his religion, and he felt the ad and his role in it were in good taste and appropriate."

Lorin Pullman, a spokeswoman at Abdul Jabbar's Los Angeles publicity firm, said she would consult the company's attorneys and try to reach the NBA star for comment.

"One does not have to be an expert on the Koran to know that (alcohol prohibition) is a basic fundamental doctrine in

Islam," said Mohamed Jodeh, president of the Colorado Muslim Society.

Jodeh said Muslims even instruct their financial advisers to avoid investing in businesses with ties to alcohol.