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Reading: The Gospel of John Part 2, The Trial

The Message: Meditation

[Video](#)

Some people seem able to go through life calmly, appearing relaxed. Others worry about everything.

Anxiety seems to become, for some, an insurmountable obstacle. Uncertainty about the future can cause us to make unwise, even hurtful decisions.

I teach a course on Systems Theory and Leadership to Doctor of Ministry students at Tyndale University. One of my students, Jerome Ebu, is from a region of the Congo that has been under the cloud of civil war. His people come to church weekly, saying, “my brother was killed yesterday.” Sometimes they don’t come to church at all. And that means that they have been killed.

I ask the students to prepare and share case studies from their ministries, which we analyse in class using the principles they learn. Jerome’s case was, of course, full of the anxiety of their context.

A Canadian student presented a case that was based on an issue that arose while she was away. Two of the leaders of the group that were in charge of fellowship events came to her very distressed. The custodian had put up a new towel rack in the kitchen. But not in the place that they wanted.

The first thing I noticed was this: the level of anxiety in the congregation was the same for those in the safety of Canada and those under threat of a violent death. I am an anxious person, an inheritance passed down in our family for generations. It is sobering to me to realize that the intensity of my anxious feelings may have little to do with the severity of the situation. One of the learnings of my ministry, is that it is not helpful to act out of my anxiety.

I think Judas may have been such a man: overcome by anxiety and uneasiness about the future. He couldn’t stand by and wait for whatever would happen to happen. The suspense was too much for him to bear. He acted out of his anxiety.

Perhaps you have been there.

When he betrayed Jesus to the soldiers with a kiss, Judas was ending his own life before ever he took his own life. He was so overcome by apprehension, he just couldn’t stand it, so he created the moment of crisis, took an action that would precipitate the future for Jesus, the future for the world, and his own death.

Peter too was overwhelmed by fear. Perhaps Simon Peter remembered Jesus naming him Peter, which means ‘rock’ and saying to him,

“And I tell you, you are Peter; on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.”

Whatever would Peter do with this ragtag bunch of followers without Jesus? How would he fill those sandals? He tried to escape his relationship with Jesus -- denying him three times out of fear for his safety, confusion and apprehension about the future.

Perhaps you have been there -- fearful about coping when a boss retires, a parent dies, the one you have counted on is no longer there.

These two men are men for our time: betraying what is most sacred in order to avoid pain.

One sought to protect himself by seeking an alliance with power -- desperate to get control of his own life but in the process he lost his life -- and Jesus had known this about Judas.

And one sought to protect himself by running away -- escaping the powers that be and avoiding the suspense of what would happen to Jesus, and the responsibility of carrying on -- and Jesus had known this about Peter.

One moment of choice is all that separated Judas and Peter. One would be reviled for all time and the other would go on to become the rock upon whom the church would be built and the role model for 265 popes since.

Although Peter repented and Judas killed himself, they weren't all that different in Jesus' eyes. He loved them both: they were both worthy of his love. There is no evidence that he chastised either one of them. Apart from letting them know that he knew them better than they knew themselves, he treated them in the same way he did all his followers. He loved Peter. He loved Judas. He called them; He taught them. On this costliest of days, I truly believe that he would have suffered and died just for Peter. On this costliest of days, I truly believe that he would have suffered and died just for Judas.

We mark this day by listening to the story, and putting ourselves into the story -- knowing that Jesus died for all. But as we place ourselves into this part of the story, identifying with the anxiety of Peter and of Judas, we have to know that Jesus didn't just die for all, he died for each -- for each one of them and for each one of us -- and to know that, as we listen to the rest of the Good Friday story, you and I are of utmost importance to Jesus and therefore to God. You were there.

And that means that, no matter what our level of anxiety is, we don't have to make rash decisions on the basis of that anxiety. We can rest in our faith. We can know we are not alone. We are in this together. And God is with us. Even and especially on the cross.