

Holy Wednesday 2017
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Hakelama is not a popular stop on those making the Holy Land Tour. On a contemporary map it is called Hinnom Valley. It is one of the few places named in the New Testament whose present-day location scholars are reasonably sure is accurate, yet there are no plaques to commemorate it. No one selling kitchen memorabilia. No tour buses that stop by. Within sight of the Mount of Olives where Jesus ascended into heaven, Hakeldama's claim to fame is it is the land that Judas purchased with the thirty pieces of silver that he earned for betraying Jesus. It is also the place of his demise by his own hand.

Judas is a compelling character, even if his location isn't a must see. What we come to know about him grows and grows from barely anything in the first gospel to be written, Mark, to lots of added commentary in the gospel of John. You know it's added commentary because it is in parenthesis. By the time we get to John, Judas has been transformed from an ordinary disciple who betrays Jesus to a thieving plotter, possessed by Satan who betrays Jesus. In the centuries since his life, fictional accounts have imagined him in all kinds of ways, a loyal Judas who does what Jesus asked him to do, a double agent, a guilt-stricken betrayer. The scholar Kim Paffenroth who has studied Judas a great deal writes, "We will never see Judas, and we will never not see him because, like every historical or literary character, he is found everywhere and in everyone." In the work *Last Supper*, Leonard da Vinci defied centuries of tradition by depicting Judas at the table at the last supper, not already gone, but sitting near Jesus. His face is obscured by a shadow - da Vinci had trouble painting him, imagining his face, and in the end he made him resemble a prior he hated.

We will never see Judas and we will never not see him. It is impossible to see betrayal coming, and impossible not to fear it again once it has happened, and it has happened on some level to all of us. A betrayal of a friend who lied, a co-worker who deceived, the person who promised they'd love us forever but didn't. Or we were the betrayer. To be betrayed is to be vulnerable to a unique kind of pain. To betray another is to be vulnerable to a unique kind of pain. The kind of pain that can weigh one down in fear, regret, trepidation, guilt.

Even the disciples, as close as they were to Jesus, were vulnerable to betrayal - both to being the betrayer and being betrayed. Here they are sitting at table with Jesus, and in this reading, he literally tells them that the one who is going to betray him is there and he's about to give him some bread. And when he does, they still don't get it. They still don't believe that Judas is the one. They can't see the one who will betray them even when they know he is there. Perhaps the lesson there is that if the disciples could not see betrayal coming from Judas, maybe those who betray are not the demons we imagine them to be. That doesn't make the consequences any less real. It doesn't make the pain caused any less real. But it also means that we can't write them off either. Betrayers have a place at Christ's table too.

All of the gospels have Judas betraying Jesus. It's kind of surprising that he isn't played up more as a villain. The enemy within lurking from the very beginning. Even in the gospel of John, there's only a few negative lines about him. I think that it's actually a sign that the first disciples forgave Judas his betrayal, despite the pain it caused them and that it directly led to Jesus' death. In light of Christ's resurrection, it just didn't seem like the thing to emphasize in their story. May we all experience God in this way, that the betrayals and betraying that we experience in our own stories pale in comparison to the new life that rises in them.