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“Morning after morning he opens my ear that I may hear” (Isaiah 50:5).

*Isa 50:4-9a; Matt 26:14-25*

As we approach the Triduum, the readings lay the groundwork of text fulfillments from the Psalms, Exodus, Jeremiah and another of Isaiah’s Servant songs. Jesus’ last Passover meal with his disciples includes one of most painful moments in their relationships when Jesus says that one of them will betray him. As God’s Servant, Jesus has “set his face like flint” (Isa 4:8) to endure his coming suffering. Greater than any physical torment is his realization that Judas has already made arrangements with the high priests to betray him.

“Even my close friend whom I trusted and who shared my table, broke bread with me, will raise his heel against me” (Ps 41:9). For this treachery Judas has received 30 pieces of silver, the price of a slave (Exodus 21:32). Whatever he thought would happen, when Judas realized he had just sold out his master to his death, he threw the coins into the Temple treasury and hung himself. The “blood money” was used to buy a field for a common grave for paupers and unknown, unclaimed or indigent people to be buried” (Jeremiah 32).

These text allusions serve Matthew's purpose of showing his Jewish converts that the fate of Jesus had been foretold in the Scriptures. The human drama being described is one of unspeakable poignancy and sorrow, that Jesus knew he was laying down his life not just for his friends but also his enemies, his disciples who betrayed, denied and abandoned him in his hour of need. We are learning the real meaning of unconditional love.

Judas' fate has been portrayed in the Gospels and in popular culture as the tragic result of greed, but it is clear that Jesus chose him to be a disciple because he had looked at him with love. Perhaps Judas was that lost sheep the shepherd left the flock to search for and bring home. We don't know whether from his cross Jesus looked across to wherever Judas was preparing to hang himself and knew that his redemptive death that day would claim both the good thief crucified next to him and a beloved disciple who, even in despair, would not escape God's infinite love and mercy.

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