

"Learning Discipleship from the Disciples"
Thaddaeus/Judas: That's a Good Question

John 14:22-24

John Breon

Once again we're in the upper room. Jesus and his disciples are sharing a meal together. Jesus has washed the disciples' feet. Judas Iscariot has gone out into the night. Now Jesus shares with the remaining disciples what we call his "farewell discourse." Jesus is dying tomorrow. He has this last opportunity to reinforce what he has been teaching his followers, to make sure they remember, and to prepare them for their new way of life without his physical presence.

Jesus' teaching here includes conversation with his disciples. Four times different disciples ask Jesus about what he's telling them. Simon Peter asks where Jesus is going and promises to follow faithfully (13:33-14:1). Next, Thomas asks the way to the place Jesus is going (14:5-7). Philip then asks Jesus to show them the Father (14:8). The fourth question and response are what we're considering now (14:22-24).

The questioner is another disciple named Judas, but John is quick to tell us that this is not Judas Iscariot, not the traitor. So, who is this Judas? Looking at the lists of apostles, we see that Matthew (10:3) and Mark (3:18) don't mention another Judas, but someone named Thaddaeus. Luke, however, lists a man named Judas son of James (6:16; Acts 1:13).

How Luke introduces his list of apostles is also interesting. He says, "Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles" (6:12-13). Prayer was a vital part of Jesus' life and a lot of prayer went into choosing these twelve that he would authorize and send as his representatives.

With Judas Thaddaeus we seem to have another case of one person with two names—either a nickname or a place name. If you were a disciple and your name was also Judas, how would you like to be known? The desire not to be associated with the one who betrayed Jesus may account for this

Judas being known by another name in a couple of the Gospels. He's also sometimes known as Jude, or by the Hebrew version of his name, Judah.

The model for Judas Thaddaeus was a college student who was working as a waiter in a restaurant. Kenneth Wyatt met him there and wanted to portray Judas as the youngest of the apostles. He painted this Judas with a scroll to show his willingness to search and know (*The Apostles* 46).

This is another little known disciple. If it weren't for his inquisitiveness, if he hadn't spoken up at the Last Supper and asked Jesus this question, we wouldn't have any other record of him in the Bible.

In response to Philip, Jesus has talked about revealing God the Father. He's introduced the coming of the Holy Spirit and said that the world can't accept or receive the Spirit of Truth who continues to reveal God in Jesus. This seems to trouble Judas Thaddaeus, and maybe the others at the table. So he asks, "But Lord, why us?" Why make yourself known to us and not to the whole world? Why don't you show yourself to everyone?

This other Judas, and the rest of the disciples, probably thought Jesus was going to set up his kingdom right away. So he wondered why Jesus would say that people wouldn't accept what he has to say. Why wouldn't Jesus promote his cause with a full-scale public relations campaign? Why all this negative talk about going away and the world not believing? Lord, why not show yourself to the world?

Jesus has been tempted to do this, but he's refused. At the high point of his ministry, the crowd he miraculously fed tried to force him to be king (John 6:14-15). His own brothers, not yet believing in him, taunted him about keeping his works and his identity secret (7:1-5). The crowd in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday gave him public acclaim (12:12-19).

Now Judas Thaddaeus wants to know why this select group of disciples are the only ones to receive the special revelation and indwelling of the Holy Spirit that Jesus has been talking about. Why not tell everybody?

Jesus responds, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching (or, keep my word). My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them."

The way of Jesus is the way of love. Trying to promote life in him any other way doesn't work. Judas Thaddaeus wonders why Jesus doesn't dazzle the crowds into joining the cause. Jesus explains that a person can't be forced into discipleship. If we're going to follow Jesus' teachings, it will be because we love him (Ellsworth Kalas, *The Thirteen Apostles* 110). Something about the revelation of Jesus has to come through faith to those who will receive it. It can't just be spread around indiscriminately or displayed grandly. That might overwhelm us into believing, or it might harden our hearts, but it wouldn't bring us into the kind of relationship Jesus wants with us.

We can't strong-arm people into believing and receiving what Jesus offers. Gimmicks, tricks, or manipulation are not the way to win people and make disciples. And we shouldn't be surprised or disappointed when people who don't know and love Jesus don't follow him or don't act like Christians. Jesus draws a distinction between his followers and the "world," that is, those people who reject Jesus and live without reference to or reverence for God. The world in that sense doesn't receive Jesus' revelation. Only the first eyewitnesses received the first postresurrection revelation of Jesus. But now all believers can experience the same revelation because Jesus continues to be present among his people in the Holy Spirit. Jesus is not manifest to the world because he is revealed only to those who love and obey him, not to those who don't (Craig Keener, *The Gospel of John*).

But at the same time:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. (John 3:16-17)

In a little bit, Jesus tells the disciples that part of the Holy Spirit's work is to convict the world about sin and righteousness and judgment (16:7-10).

Part of the gospel's purpose is to lead us from death to life, to help us cross the line from identifying with the rebellious world to identifying with God's people in Jesus, to stop resisting Jesus and yield to him.

I'm reading a brand new book by Trevor Hudson, a South African pastor. The book is *Holy Spirit Here and Now*. Describing the Spirit's work, Hudson tells his own story of how the Holy Spirit brought him alive to God's presence. He grew up in a family that didn't pray or go to church. He can remember attending Sunday worship with his dad once when he was growing up.

In tenth grade he changed schools and became good friends with a guy named Philip. They played rugby together, hung out together, had long conversations. Fairly quickly it became clear to Trevor that Philip understood and lived his life in a radically different way. God seemed real and present in his life. His faith was more than talk. He wanted to please God in all he did. This "God-reality" gave his life an unusual depth of purpose and direction. One day, Trevor asked him, "Philip, what makes your life different?"

Very simply, Philip introduced him to his relationship with Jesus Christ. He shared how Jesus had died for our sin, told him about Jesus' resurrection, and explained how God's Spirit comes to live in our lives today. Philip told Trevor that if he wanted to experience God's presence, he needed to turn toward Jesus and give his life to Jesus. "Basic street-level theology opened my heart and mind to God's good-news story. I knew I had a decision to make. For the first time in my life I began to consider that Jesus wanted me not only to believe in his existence but also to trust and follow him."

Walking down the street late one night, Trevor looked up at the night sky and said something like, "Lord Jesus, thank you for everything you did for me. I give myself to you. I want to follow you for the rest of my life. Please come into my life, and make me the person you want me to be." The next night he went to a youth rally where the speaker invited those who wanted to follow Christ to come forward. Feeling a little unsure about his request the night before, he walked down the aisle and knelt at the front rail. His journey with Jesus into life with God had begun.

Following that decision, Jesus seemed to step out of the mists of history and into my life as my living friend and guide. When I spoke

with him in prayer, I experienced a new awareness of God in my life. I began reading the Bible with fresh eyes. I started with the letter [of] James and sought to put into practice what I read. I sensed a new desire within me to avoid evil, to do what what good, and to please God. Philip took me to a nearby Methodist Church where I formed friendships with other followers of Jesus. I started worshiping with others for the first time, even though I don't sing too well. I began seeing people as infinitely precious and sacred. In a nutshell, I discovered that turning toward Christ had brought God's presence alive in my life. The Holy Spirit was at work! (31-33)

If we respond to God's love by loving God and committing ourselves to him, we experience something like that. God the Father, God the Son (Jesus), the Holy Spirit make their home in us. A new presence, a new life, comes into us. I like that Trevor Hudson talks about his journey with Jesus into life with God. At the beginning of John's Gospel we see the story of disciples beginning to follow Jesus. The disciples are present all through the Gospel. This shows us that we can start with some revelation of Jesus, we can grow to love him more, and so receive more revelation (Keener). It's an ongoing process.

Loving God, loving Jesus is our response to God's love, God's goodness and beauty and truth and all the wonderful qualities that we discover in God. One description of the Trinity is that the Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father. Their love is always pouring from and into each other. That love is so real and so alive, that the Holy Spirit is that love. Jesus says that the Father loves us. Jesus loves us. Jesus tells disciples that he will give them, give us, the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit, we enter into and share the love that flows among the Persons of the Trinity. As the apostle Paul says, "God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us" (Romans 5:5).

Now this love is not mushy and sentimental. It's vigorous, lively, bracing, and strong. If we love Jesus, we obey him, obey his teaching, keep his word. When we love someone, we really listen and respond to that person. When we love Jesus, we take action. This love is not passive.

I know we don't like to think about obeying commands. And if that's all we think about, it leads to legalism and bondage. But we're talking about obeying or keeping the word of God who loves us, Jesus who gives himself for us, the Spirit of love who fills us. God's commands are for our good. In this conversation with the disciples, Jesus repeats that loving him means keeping his commands (14:15) and obeying his teaching (23, 24). Keeping his commands means we remain in his love and we are his friends (15:10, 14).

And what does Jesus command?

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. (13:34)

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. (15:12)

This is my command: Love each other. (15:17)

He also says to believe in him and not to be afraid (14:1, 27), to remain in him, connected to him (15:4). In the first three Gospels, Jesus' sums up God's law by saying we are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40).

In the Twelfth Century, Bernard of Clairvaux wrote about "four degrees of love." He says that we start by loving ourselves for our own sake. We are uninterested in anything that doesn't relate to ourselves. Then, we begin to see that we need God, so we start to love God for our own sake, for our own interests.

But if we begin to worship and come to God again and again by meditating, by reading, by prayer, and by obedience, little by little God becomes known to us through experience. We enter into a sweet familiarity with God, and by tasting how sweet the Lord is we pass into the third degree of love so that now we love God, not for our own sake, but for himself.

The fourth degree of love is when we love ourselves only for the sake of God. We may not attain this perfectly in this life. "But when it does happen, we will experience the joy of the Lord and be forgetful of ourselves in a wonderful way. We are, for those moments, one mind and one spirit with God" (*On the Love of God*, excerpted in *Devotional Classics*, ed. Richard Foster and James Bryan Smith).

Where are you on the journey? Do you know that God loves you? Have you begun to respond to God in love? Are you showing love for God in loving other people?

This apostle, Judas Thaddaeus, lived love and obedience. Christian tradition and legend say that he traveled to Edessa, where he healed the king and led him to Christ. He is also supposed to have preached in Persia and Armenia. There he was martyred by being shot with arrows.

Ellsworth Kalas points out that this apostle is also known as Jude, "Saint Jude." He's most famous to many of us through the children's medical center in Memphis that's named after him. In the Roman Catholic tradition he's known as the patron saint of the desperate and the despairing. He's the saint of lost causes. Since he bore the same name as the betrayer, a lot of early Christians had trouble identifying with him. Those who asked the saints for help praying were reluctant to use Judas's name as their advocate, unless and until all other saints had been appealed to without success. So Jude became the saint of last resort (112).

If you are desperate, at the end of your rope, Jude would invite you know and love his Lord who loves you. But why wait to turn to the Lord until we've tried everything else and bottomed out? Why not accept God's love now, put our confidence in Christ, love him and keep his word as he makes himself known to us, as he lives his life in us through the Holy Spirit? Let's start the journey with Jesus into life with God. Or, let's take the next step on the journey as we walk with him.