

Pastor Liz Kuglin-Alyea's Sermon for March 1, 2026

Broken Trust - Lent 2

Who do you trust these days?

National leaders? Especially after waking up yesterday morning to the news that the United States and Israeli governments ordered the bombing of targets in Iran? And Iran launching missiles after declaring in turn that all U.S. and Israeli assets are “legitimate military objectives” in Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain?

Provincial leaders? I'm glad to have moved from Alberta but then British Columbia has its own issues.

Municipal leaders? Even here there are differing opinions and conflicting agendas.

Sometimes it seems that the only person one can trust is oneself! That might well have been what was going on in Judas' head that day when went to the Sanhedrin, the highest court of justice and the supreme council of elders in ancient Jerusalem, offering to betray Jesus.

Let's backtrack for a moment. In Matthew's gospel account, Judas must have been following Jesus from early on, standing among the crowds listening to Jesus' teaching on the mount, seeing the leper healed, hearing how Peter's mother-in-law was healed, feeling the storm being calmed, witnessing the paralytic walking, the ruler's daughter rising from the dead, and demons being cast out. He and the other eleven, were commissioned by Jesus to go out and preach that the Kingdom of God was at hand. Judas, along with the other eleven disciples, had been picked by Jesus to live intimately with him, adopting his way of life as well as his message. And that was just the beginning. Judas must have trusted Jesus, at least in the beginning.

But when did his trust in Jesus begin to turn? When the religious leaders started to voice their opposition to Jesus? When Jesus began to prophecy his own suffering, death and rising on the third day? When Jesus entered Jerusalem, not as a great leader on a steed, but riding humbly on a donkey? When Judas heard the rumours that there was a plan to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him? We don't know what caused Judas to lose trust in Jesus and it does no good to conjure up explanations for Judas' betrayal. It's enough to know that Jesus did not break trust with Judas but that Judas broke trust with Jesus. And where did that leave Judas? Trusting in only himself. Consequently, he took action. And we know the story of how that ended.

Betrayal for thirty pieces of silver—in Exodus that is the price of a slave who has been accidentally killed by an ox and the wages of the prophet Zechariah, who portrays a shepherd who is rejected by his sheep.

A kiss on the cheek—a sign of respect in those days transformed into betrayal.

Return of the thirty pieces of silver—repentance and confession in betraying innocent blood.

Hanging—Judas’ own judgment on himself.

Repentance is that deep feeling of regret or guilt for a wrong committed. Often accompanied by a strong desire to make amends or seek forgiveness, it can be expressed through apologies, or trying to repair the damage caused, or by self-imposed punishment.

Judas had choices to make: to do nothing and live with his act for the rest of his life or impose his own judgment on himself—the choice he did make. But there was another choice, had he had the courage to take it. He might have found his way to Pilate’s residence, standing amongst the crowd as he had at the very beginning of his time with Jesus, and then moving with it to the place of the skull. He might have stood off a ways but fixing his eyes only on Jesus as he was dying on the cross. He might have mouthed the words “Forgive me” and heard what Luke records Jesus saying, “*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.*” (Luke 23: 34)

He might have. But didn’t.

Many view Judas as the ultimate betrayer. Yet his story also invites us to ponder the human condition—the frequency with which we turn inwards, trusting only ourselves. God’s compassion, grace and forgiveness is found in the cross—if only we trust the One beyond ourselves who showed us the depth of that grace on the cross.

In my first congregation, there was a large skylight in the peak of the roofline behind the altar. On the wall immediately below the skylight, hung a 25-foot cross, a simple, whitewashed, gnarled and rough cut from tree branches. And when the sun shone through the skylight, the cross was illuminated in such a way that no one in the congregation could take their eyes off it. I can see it in my mind’s eye even after all these years. We couldn’t escape its presence. It’s been said that we must face the cross. We can’t go under it. We can’t go over it. We can’t go around it. We must go through it. We learn that even in our

moment of deepest remorse and repentance, there's a path to turning to God and receiving God's forgiveness rather than being consumed by our own words and actions.

How often we betray our Lord in our thoughts, through our words, by our actions. However our betrayal manifests itself, it is a matter of broken trust. Betrayal shatters homes, strains work relationships and destroys friendships. We betray our Lord when we absent ourselves from his presence, when we stop to think about him and our minds dart away even into the shadows, when we remain silent when we need to speak his truth, when we turn away from the opportunities to proclaim his gospel because...well...because.

In many ways, this morning, although we want Judas to be nothing at all like us, perhaps we've gotten a peak of him peering back at us as in a mirror. We might remember times when we have trusted only ourselves. We have tried to be our own god. This is an act of betrayal. It has broken trust.

And here is the good news: as the psalmist says, *"My help comes from God, maker of heaven and earth."* (Psalm 121: 2) Here, in the community of faith, we remind each other of that truth. Paul writes in his letter to the early church in Rome, *"But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the law and prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, they—and that includes us—are justified by God's grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in God's forbearance he had passed over former sins."* (Romans 3: 21-26) Here, we humbly confess our sins and receive forgiveness. Here, we are mutually encouraged by each other's faith. Here, we learn to turn to God first, to trust that no sin is too great for God's grace, even betrayal. God is faithful and there is nothing—absolutely nothing—no thought, no word, no action, no broken trust—that can separate us from the free gift of God's unconditional love in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen. Let it be so with us.