



SERMON RECAP MARCH 15, 2026

Fifth Sunday of Lent
“Killed by shame”
Matthew 27:1-26

Two men made shameful decisions in this passage. One tried to make amends, but succumbed to despair. The other made an empty gesture and tried to avoid accountability. Two tragic figures who, for most of Christian history, have been remembered in the wrong way.

Far too many Christians over the centuries have bought into Pilate's empty gesture. He washed his hands of guilt and then - crucified Jesus. No hand washing could change fact that one man had the power to crucify Jesus, and he chose to do it. Centuries of violence against Jews can be traced back to the lie that the “Jews killed Jesus.” There are other unfortunate moments in the Bible that help build that false narrative, but this is one of the biggest.

Let me be clear: Pilate crucified Jesus. All the explanations, misgivings, hand washing, and excuses do not change the fact that the Roman authority executed Jesus for treason. There were a lot of factors involved, but as we explored last week, fear from the leadership was the primary one. Power built on exploitation and fear is threatened by communities of love and justice. Jesus' Kingdom of God was a threat that was feared by both religious and political power, so he was crucified. While Pilate's motivation is muddied by the Biblical story of his misgivings, it remains clear.

Judas' motivation is often depicted in clear ways, but a closer look actually muddies the situation. For most of Christian history, Judas is depicted as greedy or demonic. Artists have often given him darker complexion, a pointier nose, and played up ugly stereotypes about Jewish people.

Movies, dramas, and musicals have wrestled with Judas' motivations for generations. I have always said however, that I do not need to speculate on Judas' motivation. I only need to look into my own heart. I know why Judas might have betrayed Jesus because I know why I betray Jesus time and again.

This is why I don't think of Judas as a wicked figure. I think of him more as a tragic one. He got caught up in something and didn't know how to get out. His death was not an act of evil or cowardice. It simply seals the tragedy. While Pilate tried to escape accountability, Judas could not escape his own shame, and I think the write of Matthew had a similar idea.



Two 15th century paintings of the death of Judas present him as a monstrous figure whose innocent soul is being devoured by Satan while his innards are spilled (Acts 1).

Matthew 27:9 includes a quote attributed to Jeremiah, but actually came from Zachariah. “*And I took the thirty pieces of silver, the price for the one whose price had been set by some of the Israelites, and I gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me.*” This describes a moment in Zachariah when the prophet demands payment, and is insulted. Zachariah was a prophet to the exiles who shared a dire warning, but also maintained audacious hope. Zachariah believed that the people could be redeemed.

The quote is attributed incorrectly to Jeremiah, who famously bought a field and talked about God the potter. The metaphor of God the potter was about the ability for the people to be remade. Yes, they were broken and suffered greatly, but there was still a chance for God to shape them into something good. And in buying a field in the midst of exile, Jeremiah “put his money where his mouth is,” showing that he believed that Israel could be rebuilt. I believe Matthew called upon Jeremiah and Zachariah because he believed Judas could have been redeemed. It is the great tragedy that Judas did not give Jesus a chance to forgive him like he did Peter and the others.

And here is the most important part of the story - You can be redeemed too. If you are giving in to despair, heed the warning of Judas. Shame can seep into your spirit, and it can be devastating, even deadly. Shame can spread like a virus. Allow Jesus back in. You are not defined by your past deeds. It may not be as simple as washing your hands, but Jesus can get you clean.

Suicidal thoughts and self-harm is not something you can just “pray away.” Call 988 if you have suicidal thoughts. Seek a counselor, talk to a friend, call me. Take your prescribed mental health medicine. You can be made well. You can be redeemed. Let Christ be a part of your healthy, loving life.

NEXT WEEK:

Mocked and Crucified, Matthew 27:27-44