Hi,

Supposed to be a sunny warm (very?!) day -- that ought to lift spirits.

Here are today’s updates:

* The links to my on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org/). This week’s recordings will be up by the end of the day.
* If you have any movie or book recommendations you’d like to share with everyone, please send them along.

On Wednesday of Holy Week, Judas, one of the Twelve, decided to betray Jesus and approached the Jewish leaders. Here is Judas’s story.

***Mark 14:1–21 (NIV)***

**Now the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were scheming to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. 2“But not during the festival,” they said, “or the people may riot.”**

**3While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.**

**4Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, “Why this waste of perfume? 5It could have been sold for more than a year’s wages and the money given to the poor.” And they rebuked her harshly.**

**6“Leave her alone,” said Jesus. “Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. 7The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. 8She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. 9Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”**

**10Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. 11They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand him over.**

**12On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus’ disciples asked him, “Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?”**

**13So he sent two of his disciples, telling them, “Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. 14Say to the owner of the house he enters, ‘The Teacher asks: Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ 15He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.”**

**16The disciples left, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.**

**17When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. 18While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me.”**

**19They were saddened, and one by one they said to him, “Surely you don’t mean me?”**

**20“It is one of the Twelve,” he replied, “one who dips bread into the bowl with me. 21The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.”**

***Mark 14:43–47 (NIV)***

**43Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders.**

**44Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: “The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.” 45Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, “Rabbi!” and kissed him. 46The men seized Jesus and arrested him. 47Then one of those standing near drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.**

***Matthew 27:1–5 (NIV)***

**Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people made their plans how to have Jesus executed. 2So they bound him, led him away and handed him over to Pilate the governor.**

**3When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. 4“I have sinned,” he said, “for I have betrayed innocent blood.”**

**“What is that to us?” they replied. “That’s your responsibility.”**

**5So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.**

I don’t recall ever meeting a man who called himself “Judas.” Judah, Jude . . . yes. But not Judas. It is a shame in a way. It once was a good and strong name, the Greek form of the name “Judah,” the largest of the tribes of Israel. Two of Jesus’ disciples are named Judas (in English translations). But now, it is a name set aside and rarely used. It has been that way for 2,000 years. “Judas” came to mean “Betrayer.”

The truth is that Judas has become a caricature. We tend to see him one-dimensionally, as if his betrayal of Jesus is all that there is to know about Judas Iscariot. But that can’t be. Judas was part of Jesus’ inner circle, one of the twelve. And he was the treasurer of the group, the keeper of the purse. Do we have to assume that he was a bad egg all along? Or that Jesus chose him knowing that Judas would betray him?

Was he really so different from the other disciples? Yes, Judas betrayed Jesus to the authorities. But Peter would deny three times that he even knew Jesus. Do we really have to get into which act deserves the greater condemnation? I wonder what Peter would say about it?

Here, James Edwards looks at the portrait of Judas in Mark’s gospel:

Mark closes the plot against Jesus with Judas’s agreement to betray his master (vv. 10–11). Luke 22:3 and John 13:2, 27 say that Satan caused Judas to betray Jesus, but Mark does not lay at Satan’s feet the moral failure of Jesus’ followers. Indeed, Judas’s betrayal is a prototype of the defection of the other apostles as well (14:50). According to Mark, his betrayal is more reprehensible only because it was premeditated, and more final only because he foreclosed on the possibility of forgiveness by committing suicide. That money played a part in Judas’s decision is probable, for according to the Gospel of John he was the treasurer of the Twelve, and a thief (John 12:6; 13:29). Also according to Mark, the transaction of money accompanied the plot (v. 11). The best way to detect the source of evil in practically any matter is to ask who profits from it financially, and Judas profited from the betrayal. More ideological or even idealistic motives may also have played a role. It has been suggested, for example, that Judas acted as a spy of the Sanhedrin; or that he was a closet Zealot disillusioned with Jesus’ political passivity, hoping by the plot to force Jesus’ hand to act. What truth there might be in such suggestions we cannot say, for our texts are silent about Judas’s motives.

Despite its economy, Mark’s account implies that Judas was fully responsible for his betrayal of Jesus. It is he who goes to the chief priests, not they to him; and in one of the bitterest lines in the Gospel, his treachery causes them joy (14:11). The account closes with no Hamlet-like soliloquy lamenting a tragic decision, but with Judas’s icy resolve to his complete his insidious plan: “So he watched (Gk. *zētein*) for an opportunity to hand him over.” Judas is thus not a victim of circumstances or a pawn dominated by greater forces. He is a sovereign moral agent who freely chooses evil in “handing Jesus over” (Gk. *paradidomi*). That word, the final part of the sandwich in vv. 1–11, combines the two essential truths of Jesus’ passion: the freely chosen evil of humanity, and the overarching providence of God. Divine grace uses even human evil for its saving purposes.

As Edwards notes, we are left guessing when it comes to Judas’s motives, but isn’t that the way it is for us most of the time. I have enough trouble understanding my own motives, much less someone else’s.

Several years ago, we did a series on the seven deadly sins (more precisely, the seven capital vices). One of the seven is avarice/greed. Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung subtitles her chapter on avarice: “I want it all.” Avarice is the excessive and disordered desire for money and what it can buy. Perhaps Judas had fallen into its deadly grip. Perhaps keeping the purse for Jesus and his disciples proved too much. Perhaps he justified his action on his “disappointment” with Jesus, for he was certainly not the sort of messiah Judas or anyone else expected. Perhaps he thought he was helping Jesus along – pushing him to reveal himself to all. Yes, there is no end to the justifications we can offer for anything we do – even if, in truth, it is greed that motivates us.

And at the meal that followed Judas’s visit to the priests and scribes, the last meal, Jesus told his disciples that one of them was going to betray him. Of course, Jesus doesn’t really need Judas to “help” him along. Jesus has always known that his path would take him to a direct confrontation with the earthly powers: Rome, the priests, the scribes. All would gather around Jesus like dark, ominous clouds pushing him to his death. When the woman had come to pour expensive perfume over Jesus, it was a burial anointing. Mark wants us to grasp that this anointing was done in the midst of the chief priests, the scribes . . . and Judas.

As the disciples eat their last supper with Jesus, he tells them that the betrayer will be the “one who dips into the bowl with me.” Even here, there is meaning, pointed and sharp. It was the Jewish custom that the leader would eat first and the followers after. Thus, in this simple moment, Judas is disordered and apart. He will eat “with” Jesus, not after him, unwilling to offer Jesus this small portion of respect.

Judas’s fall is complete when, in the night, he greets Jesus, “Rabbi!,” and then kisses him on the cheek, cementing the identification for the arrest party. What a horrid and sad moment. A kiss? Did it have to be a kiss?

And so Jesus is arrested, taken away, questioned, and executed.

And Judas? Leon Morris considers the post-crucifixion Judas:

Judas was filled with remorse as he now realized what his conduct had led to. If he had been motivated by a desire to precipitate action that would lead to Jewish independence, he now saw that nothing of the sort was going to happen. If, as we have seen, he had simply tried to get what he could out of it all, then he now saw that the damage he had done was out of all proportion to the small gain he had made. Interestingly, the result of his remorse was a return to the Jewish leaders, bringing with him the thirty silver pieces they had paid him for the betrayal. They, of course, were religious leaders as well as politicians, and it may be that in his spiritual anguish Judas was looking for guidance and help. If so, he was to be bitterly disappointed, for these men were not particularly interested in helping people like Judas. Their minds were set on getting Jesus executed, and that was not yet accomplished.

Judas’s confession, “I sinned,” shows that he had come to appreciate something of the enormity of the evil thing he had done. He spells it out with, “I betrayed innocent blood.” Most translations read, “I have sinned,” but Judas’s use of the aorist tense rather concentrates attention on the one great act of sin rather than on the man’s general sinfulness (Moffatt renders, “I did wrong”). The enormity of his betrayal of Jesus had come home to his conscience, and it is this that he is now confessing. But those who had paid the bribe to get Jesus into their hands were the wrong people to bring spiritual comfort to this remorseful sinner. They disclaim responsibility. “What is that to us?” they ask. It is a question to which they might well have given attention, for it was a very great deal to their discredit that they had paid money for the arrest of a man who was innocent and whom they were in the process of handing over to the Romans for execution. Their “you” is emphatic; they are saying that Judas’s conscience is a problem for him alone. People like the Jewish leaders had much more important things to bother about than that. To their eternal discredit these spiritual leaders of the people thought of Judas as a tool that had served its purpose and could be discarded, not as a man in desperate spiritual need.

So Judas hurled the money into the temple, or perhaps we should translate, “threw the coins down in the temple” (cf. NRSV). We do not know exactly where Judas was when this conversation took place; if he was in the temple, then NRSV could give the sense of it. Rieu points to a pious act with “Whereupon Judas left the money as an offering in the Temple,” but this seems very unlikely. The language seems to point to an irrational act of throwing the coins with some force into some holy place nearby, but not where Judas was at the point of his act. There is nothing to indicate an exercise in piety, only a reckless desire to repudiate his evil act. Then he went off and committed suicide by hanging. It is this, rather than the linguistics in verse 3, that makes it clear that Judas was remorseful rather than repentant. We might contrast him with Peter. That apostle had likewise sinned grievously, but he was moved by genuine repentance that led to amendment of life rather than to the further sin of suicide.

As Morris notes, Judas was remorseful but not repentant. He regretted what he had done, though we can’t be sure exactly what he regrets. But his remorse does not lead to genuine change in his life, that 180° change of direction that is repentance. And what God desires from us is not mere regret for the wrongs we have done, but for us to change the direction of our lives and point them unfailingly in the direction of Jesus Christ. Judas pursued his way. We pursue our way. But we were all created to pursue the Jesus Way.

*A movie recommendation*

Tom and Cheryl Ayers sent along a movie recommendation: *Seven Days in Utopia*, about a young man fighting through a breakdown. It stars Robert Duvall. Tom and Cheryl said they enjoyed it, so maybe the rest of us will give it a go. It is available on Amazon Prime. . . . Oh, the young man is a pro golfer. (That’s what you call a hook.)

*A book recommendation*

Here’s a surprising one: *The Unlikely Disciple, A Sinner’s Semester at America’s Holiest University*. It is the memoir of a young man, raised as an unchurched Quaker, who decides to go to Liberty University for a semester and then write about it. His experience is a whole lot different from what he expected. I read this book some years ago and really enjoyed it. God really can work in mysterious ways.

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott