

## War and Peace

1. Warm-up question: Jeff began by talking about the significance of names. He mentioned the meaning of his first name (Gordon = God of War) and his middle name (Jeff = God's Peace). Tell us about a name that's significant to you either because of what it means or what it represents to you. It might be one of your names or a name you gave one of your children or the name of someone you love.
  
2. On Sunday we studied Judas Iscariot, the fourth character in our sermon series about the "baddest" people in the Bible. As it turns out, Judas' name offers us a profound clue as to who he was and what ultimately motivated his betrayal of Jesus. But before we get there, first some background information.
  - a. When you experience conflict or anger, which of the following responses feels most instinctive to you:  
 I retreat and avoid       I accommodate and yield       I fight and attack
  
  - b. Jesus and Judas lived in a time of great conflict. The Romans had swept into the Middle East and completely subjugated the Jewish people. *The* most pressing question of the day was how to respond. In the politics of the time, there were three very different strategies for responding to Rome's brutal occupation. The Sadducees advocated accommodation (many called it appeasement) – be nice to the Romans, so they'll be nicer to us. The Essenes advocated retreat – they withdrew to uninhabited desert regions to live as far away from Roman oversight as possible. The Zealots believed in direct confrontation. Fight fire with fire. Violence must be met with violence. Armed resistance – guerilla warfare. Jesus was none of the above, but Judas Iscariot was a Zealot. Scholars say that "Iscariot" likely came from a Latin term "Sicarii," which means "dagger man" – the term used to refer to the most violent elements of the Zealot movement. How does this information make you feel about Judas? What are the positive character traits you would associate with Zealots? What are the negative character traits?
  
  - c. Think of a group of people that you identify with. This might be your nationality (e.g., Polish) or your demographic (e.g., gay or trans or black or Latino or poor or differently abled, etc.). Imagine that your people are being terribly oppressed. How would you feel? And how would you likely respond like an Essene, a Sadducee, or a Zealot – and why?
  
  - d. No matter how our personality is put together, most of us find it easy to hate our enemies and lash out against them. Jeff told about a time when he lashed out in a rant against his chief rival on his grade school basketball team. Tell us about a time when your anger and animus toward someone overflowed and caused you to go nuclear on someone. What happened?
  
  - e. Judas was likely drawn to Jesus because he was a powerful, charismatic leader whom Judas believed might and have the potential to unite the masses, as their

Messianic Deliverer, to rise up and expel the Romans. Imagine Judas' disappointment when Jesus started saying things like, "turn the other cheek," "go the extra mile," and "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." Although, at first blush, this may sound like appeasement, Jeff suggested it is the spiritual equivalent of declaring thermonuclear war, with the power to "destroy" our enemies, in the sense of redeeming and transforming them into friends. In your own experience, when have you seen love transform hate? What happened.

- f. When, if ever, is it appropriate to use force or violence against evil?
  - g. Dr. King said, "Returning hate for hate [only] multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." Why is hate and violence (whether physical or verbal) of little or no value in eradicating evil? Why is it often so counterproductive?
3. Judas' tipping point in turning against Jesus occurred near the end of Jesus' ministry when a woman dumped out a bottle of perfume over Jesus' head valued at \$35,000 in today's currency. Read Matthew 26:6-16, as printed on p. 3.
- a. Why were Jesus' predictions of his impending death so triggering for someone like Judas?
  - b. Jeff said Judas was seeking a God of War who'd help him and his people defeat their enemies, whereas Jesus was a God of Peace calling us to embrace sacrificial love as a means of redeeming our enemies. In your heart of hearts, are you seeking a God of War or a God of Peace? Think about your interactions with your Ex, that person at work who did you wrong, that friend who betrayed you, that family member who hurt you, that fellow church member who is the south end of a horse headed north. Are you interacting with those people like Jesus or Judas? Like warrior or a peacemaker? (Let's be as honest and transparent as we can because we all know how hard this is.)
  - c. David French said, "The older I get, the more I'm convinced that we simply don't know who we are – or what we truly believe – until our values carry a cost." Tell us about a time when you reacted to an enemy in a way that felt risky and costly because you felt God calling you to do so. What happened?
  - d. In the ultimate irony, Judas ended up becoming the very thing he most hated – an appeaser who delivered up one of his own people (Jesus) to the Roman enemy for execution. Judas' hate ended up destroying him. Tell us about a time when you've seen hate turn on someone (or even yourself) in destructive ways.

***Let's learn from Judas' example and not repeat the same tragic mistake.***

***"Love your enemies." Matthew 5:44.***

## **Matthew 26:6-16**

6 Now while Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, <sup>7</sup>a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment, and she poured it on his head as he sat at the table. <sup>8</sup>But when the disciples saw it, they were angry and said, 'Why this waste? <sup>9</sup>For this ointment could have been sold for a large sum, and the money given to the poor.' <sup>10</sup>But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, 'Why do you trouble the woman? She has performed a good service for me. <sup>11</sup>For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. <sup>12</sup>By pouring this ointment on my body she has prepared me for burial. <sup>13</sup>Truly I tell you, wherever this good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.'

14 Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests <sup>15</sup>and said, 'What will you give me if I betray him to you?' They paid him thirty pieces of silver. <sup>16</sup>And from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.