Holy Wednesday 1.10 Eucharist with Healing Prayer 2023: The Priest Pastor

It is not enemies who taunt me – I could bear that.
It is not adversaries who deal insolently with me – I could hide from them.
But it is you, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend,
with whom I kept pleasant company.
These words from Psalm 55 are full of pain. The pain of betrayal.
They speak prophetically about the experience of Jesus in Holy Week, especially today, on Holy Wednesday, traditionally called Spy Wednesday when as we heard, Judas secretly arranged with the Chief Priests to betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver.
Judas Iscariot was one of the Twelve, chosen by Jesus to be an apostle, and a familiar friend. But Jesus early on sensed the widening gap between them; a misunderstanding, a difference in the way they regarded the use of money, maybe jealousy, maybe even that mania that can come over someone when they see a solution that seems so right at the time, but ultimately is so wrong. And when we think about the pain Jesus experienced during this Holy Week, I wonder whether the psychological and emotional pain of betrayal by close friends was just as intense as the physical pain he endured. And, of course, it wasn’t just Judas; Peter denied knowing him and most of the other disciples abandoned him.
When we think about the characters of Holy Week, we know that there are elements of all of them in ourselves, including Judas and Peter. Perhaps what we learn by looking at these two characters is that even betrayal can be forgiven, but that the big lie we are tempted to believe is that our sin is too great for God’s forgiveness.
What Judas did was terrible, but he then fell into despair and shut out the possibility of that forgiveness. When we look at the life of Paul and Peter, the parable of the Prodigal Son, the thief on the cross, we see that God always seeks repentance and forgiveness; we just need to reach out and claim it, rather than turn in on ourselves, and turn away from him.
As the hymn puts it; ‘there’s a wideness in God’s mercy that is wider than the sea….for the love of God is broader than the measure of our mind and the heart of the eternal is most wonderfully kind’. Judas committed a terrible sin and he had a terrible end.

But I like the story of the child who was asked
‘What do you think Jesus was doing while he was in hell for three days?
After a long pause the child replied
‘I think he was looking everywhere for his friend Judas’
The writer Ruth Etchells put it very well in her poem
‘The Ballad of The Judas Tree’:

In Hell there grew a Judas Tree, where Judas hanged and died
Because he could not bear to see His master crucified
Our Lord descended into Hell and found his Judas there
For ever hanging on the tree grown from his own despair
So Jesus cut his Judas down and took him in his arms
“It was for this I came” he said “and not to do you harm
My Father gave me twelve good men and all of them I kept
Though one betrayed and one denied, some fled and others slept
In three days’ time I must return to make the others glad
But first I had to come to Hell and share the death you had
My tree will grow in place of yours its roots lie here as well
There is no final victory without this soul from Hell”
So when we all condemned him as of every traitor worst
Remember that of all his men Our Lord forgave him first.