

Rev. Anne J. Scalfaro  
18 May 2023

10:30 a.m. MT Worship  
3rd Sunday after Pentecost / Father's Day / Juneteenth

Calvary Baptist Church  
Denver, Colorado

***“Thaddeus (Judas son of James/not Iscariot)”***

Third sermon in the summer series, “Seeing Ourselves in the Twelve”

*Matthew 10:1-4; John 14:15-31; Acts 1:12-16*

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

*NOTE: A sermon is a spoken word event. This manuscript served as a guide but is not exact to what was preached in the moment.*

*The Joker.*

Jokic.

Nikola.

Whatever name you call him by,  
he's the MVP of the NBA  
Finals. Denver Nuggets  
Champion. Proud Serbian.  
Proud Father, Husband, Brother,  
and Son. Basketball Superstar  
who would rather just be known  
as a Teammate. In every  
interview, he's ready for it to be  
over before it even starts. He  
deflects attention from himself  
back to his coach, his  
teammates, his family, the fans.  
He rarely speaks up. But when  
he does – it matters. After the  
Heat beat the Nuggets 111-108  
in Game 2 of the Finals, Jokic  
made a speech to his teammates  
that surprised even them.  
DeAndre Jordan said it caught  
everyone by surprise to see  
Nikola that vocal: *"It was  
unexpected; When Nikola says  
something, everybody's*

*awareness is heightened...He's  
never really super boisterous,  
but when he does speak, it  
speaks volumes...Nikola saying  
something elevated the message.  
....[He] stated that the team  
needed to be locked in  
...that we can't be relaxed;  
We've got to have more fight,  
more energy, and pay attention  
to the game plan. And leading  
up to Game 3, in practice and  
shootaround, everyone was  
hyper-focused, and that  
transferred over into the game...  
There is no doubt that Nikola  
Jokic has been leading the team  
with his [skills on the court] in  
the Finals...[but it's also] clear  
that [his] vocal leadership is  
key to [our] team's mentality  
and morale as well; [his]  
speech definitely helped [us]  
win Game 3."*<sup>1</sup>

From what I can tell from the  
five times Today's Disciple is  
mentioned in scripture – Judas

<sup>1</sup> Lee Tran, “Nikola Jokic Motivated Nuggets  
Teammates With Speech After Game 2 Loss To Heat,”  
*The Wenatchee World* (8 June 2023), accessed on June  
18, 2023 at

[https://www.wenatcheeworld.com/arena/fadeaway\\_world/nikola-jokic-motivated-nuggets-teammates-with-speech-after-game-2-loss-to-heat/article\\_5943adcf-cd13-5a7c-b80f-a103bec3d82d.html](https://www.wenatcheeworld.com/arena/fadeaway_world/nikola-jokic-motivated-nuggets-teammates-with-speech-after-game-2-loss-to-heat/article_5943adcf-cd13-5a7c-b80f-a103bec3d82d.html).

son of James / Judas NOT Isacariot / Thaddeus – is kind of like Nikola / Nikola Jokic / The Joker. And not just because he has three names and is most well known by his nickname (Thaddeus) rather than his given name (Judas) – but because he, too, rarely speaks...yet when he does – it's important.

In fact, we only have on record one sentence that Judas (aka Thaddeus) speaks out loud – and it's a question. Jesus is giving what's called his “Farewell Discourse” in John's Gospel, which is a fancy way of saying, Jesus is with his disciples at the Last Supper teaching them some Last Truths that he hopes will be Lasting for their lives. And as he does so, four different disciples pipe up at various times – seeking clarification. Thaddeus, the final of these four, inquires, “*Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us and not to the world?*” (John 14:22)

In a world that seems to get more chaotic and uncertain by the day, in a world where we look at the news or look at our own lives, our own loved ones, and ask, “*How can this be?*” – Thaddeus' question makes sense. Why doesn't God just make God's presence known in

a very plain and powerful way so that *all* people *everywhere* will *know* God's love and therefore ACT in the manner of God's love? Why must there be any mystery or question around Christ's power and presence in the world? Why can't it be crystal clear to everyone that God is Love and therefore we are to Love – no exceptions?

We know why we ask those types of questions; let's set the context a bit here for why Thaddeus may have been asking. The disciples are worried about being “orphaned” as the text says, that is – without their leader or mentor or teacher – and they are scared. Jesus says something weird. He says, “*In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live.*” (John 14:19). He then goes on to say that if you keep my commandments then that means you love me and if you love me, you're loved by God and by me and I'll reveal myself to you. (John 14:20-21).

It all feels a little circular and transactional, doesn't it? (*If you do this thing then God will do this other thing, etc.*) Which is why, just a few verses later, Jesus attempts to clarify all this by saying that the way this is all

going to happen is by the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, who is coming to be with them and teach them and remind them of this love and presence and peace – and that they shouldn't worry or let their hearts be troubled because they don't have to do this on their own...it's not actually about a transaction *with* God, it's just about letting themselves be transformed *by* God. (John 14:25-27)

I'm guessing the disciples are still utterly confused by all of this, but even in their confusion, that does not stop Jesus from keeping things moving and from believing that they don't really have to understand it all in order to start living it all. I love how this final speech concludes, "*I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father*" (31) – the implication being that they, the disciples, should do the same. Then Jesus says matter of fact: "*Rise, let us be on our way,*" (31).

In other words – whether you understand or not – there is ministry to be done, God's love to be accomplished in the world, justice and peace to be enacted. After all, following this passage, Jesus will summarize his entire ministry and this final message

by giving them the new commandment, "*that you love one another as I have loved you,*" (John 14:12). In so many ways – this IS Jesus' answer to Thaddeus' question.

It's as if Jesus is saying: *I'm not NOT revealing myself to the world. I've been trying to reveal myself to the world this whole time. That's why I came to you. That's why I was born, that's why I walked this earth, that will become the meaning of my death and resurrection. But – I can't do it alone. God's love cannot be contained within one body, one messenger, one man, one time period, one generation. God's love is revealed to the world when that love is enacted and lived through ALL of our lives in ALL times, in ALL places. In other words, the world WILL see the revelation of God, when YOU (the disciples) start showing that love through your lives.*

With this, Jesus is giving the power back to the people, and that's not what the disciples expected from God.

You see, Thaddeus, like all of the disciples and really like every Jew in the first century, had been awaiting a Marvel-movie style Messiah that they

thought would come and rule with power and might and make it quite clear to the Roman Empire that *they* were in charge and were making all things right. And in a way, that is what Jesus did – but he didn’t do it as a Warrior riding in on a Horse ready to fight. He did it as a healer and teacher, trotting in on a donkey, ready to submit. He would not meet violence with violence. He would live God’s love out loud to the world – to the very end. But that Love looks like suffering and forgiving and serving and yes, even dying. Just as Jesus will rise from the dead, he wants his disciples to Rise from their ways of life that perpetuate oppression and exclusion and to “be on their way” – that is – “on the Way of Jesus” – which is a path that leads to Life, Love, and Hope. Rising and raising. Freeing and releasing.

Friday afternoon, Pastor Eugene Downing from New Hope and I were leading a Fireside Chat conversation at the Chamber of Commerce. We were speaking with about 25 or 30 CEOs and organizational leaders from across multiple fields and industries in the greater Denver area. At one point we were

discussing the rise (and stagnation) of DEI efforts. DEI stands for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion – some people add a B to that (Belonging), others add an A to that (Accessibility) – but regardless of what letters you use – the very fact that we have people who are hired and departments who are tasked with addressing the LACK of diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging, and accessibility in our businesses and organizations speaks to the truth of the Lie (as James Baldwin called it<sup>2</sup>) – upon which our country was built and continues to operate: the Lie that white lives matter more than other lives. If the privilege of whiteness (or able-bodied-ness or straightness or maleness) was no longer a thing, we would not need DEI offices and efforts.

As this circle of leaders spoke about this reality – one thing we noted is that the only way to dismantle this Lie is if this work becomes a lived value in each of our individual and personal lives, not just a corporate or church tagline or a hired DEI position in one office or department that seeks to think about this for us. Nobody can do this FOR us. We all must do this

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<sup>2</sup> From Eddie S. Glaude’s book, *Begin Again: James Baldwin’s America and Its Urgent Lessons for Our Own*.

work ourselves. We cannot ride on the backs of other people's efforts – as we so often do (often the backs of black and brown people...just look at the Civil Rights Movement!), we must be the Effort Ourselves. For example, we cannot assume here at Calvary that because people at our church voted to become a welcoming and affirming congregation for LGBTQ+ persons back in 2011, that we are automatically welcoming and affirming today in 2023 in all the ways that we need to be – both in practices and beliefs. Or that just because we have pastors who are women that patriarchy is not a part of our church systems.

I think this is what Jesus is getting at when he says: *As you keep my commandments and as you follow my teachings – as you love others – I will make my home in you – and God's love will be revealed to the world. YOU make God's love revealed to the world as you do this work. I, even as Jesus, cannot do that for you. You must do that for yourselves...and for others. The Spirit will be with you to encourage you, but you must internalize and live out this value and love in your own lives. Then, and only then, will*

*what I have revealed to you be revealed to the world.*

And when we don't do this – God's love and liberation is NOT shown to the world. Juneteenth is a reminder of what happens when Truth is concealed and not revealed. Why did it take 2.5 years after the Emancipation Proclamation for freedom to be revealed to people who were in enslaved in Texas? Why are we still, 158 years later, working for full freedom and equal rights for people who are black and brown, children and youth who are trans, men who are incarcerated, and women who are pregnant?

Each and every person on this earth is created in the unique and divine image of God. Equally, without exception. Until that Truth becomes the real value that underlies all that we do – especially as a Church, as a Body that REVEALS boldly, unequivocally, and unapologetically God's love to the world – then we are concealing the fullness of God's presence and we are part of the very reason that Thaddeus had to ask his question in the first place.

Why isn't God's presence obvious to the world? Well, maybe because God's people are not living as if the Holy Spirit of Love, Peace, Justice, and Grace is flowing through all that we do, say, and put into policy.

Pastor Downing and I were asked a hard question on Friday: how do we, as pastors and leaders, process the fact that we represent the Church – one of the most oppressive institutions in our society? How did the gospel of liberation get co-opted by policies of oppression?

We both paused and neither of us had an immediate answer other than to say that, yes, we do have to process this and deal with it everyday. The more I've thought about it, the more I think that, for predominately white churches, the answer has something to do with our deep desire to be known as "good people" instead of "God's people." We want to be known as loving and caring and the ones on the right side of history so badly that cover up, deny, defend, and re-write our history and complicity and overt participation in white supremacy so that we appear as "good people." But a lot more is required of us if we are "God's

people" than just being "good people." It means letting go of this notion of "goodness" so that we can take hold of the "gospel." And people in power and privilege rarely see the "gospel" as "good" (at least at first). But, as we see in scripture, resistance is part of re-creation.

You see, Thaddeus' question is perhaps one of the most important verses in scripture. He doesn't speak often, but when he does – it matters. Because everything is at stake with this question...and how Thaddeus, and all of us, respond.

*"Lord how is it that you will reveal yourself to us and not to the world?"* Well maybe **it's not that Christ is not willing to be revealed to the world, it's that Christ is waiting to be revealed to the world through us!**

And the Good News is – we don't have to be someone famous or special or be able to win the spiritual equivalent of an NBA championship – in order to be an MVP as a disciple. We are all MVPs (Most Valuable Players) in God's sight. Many days, I suspect that God is patiently waiting for us to discover this –

but it is true. Just by being who we are, who God created us to be, we are equipped to show and share God's love – *to reveal God's love* to the world.

And perhaps Thaddeus' names can help us see some ways that we – just by who we are – can reveal God's love to the world.

Thaddeus' real name is Judas. The writer of Luke and Acts – who places him both at the initial “calling of the Twelve disciples” and in the upper room after Jesus has died and risen but before the Holy Spirit has come at Pentecost – calls him **Judas son of James** (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:3). In Matthew and Mark, he's named in their listings of the twelve disciples by his nickname **Thaddeus** (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18). And in John's Gospel, he's named as **Judas, NOT Iscariot** (John 14:22).

What's with all these names? Well, Judas was a very popular name in New Testament times and simply means “Jehovah leads.”<sup>3</sup> Scholars say that Judas was most likely his real name and because there were so many

Judases...he was given a nickname and some identifiers.

It's Father's Day so let's start with **Judas, son of James**.

Judas is named here in relation to his father. This attaches him to his family, showing who he's connected to – what line he comes from. However, we don't know anything about that family line. We don't know who Judas was before being called to follow Jesus or where he came from. We don't know about his profession or family life other than his father being named James. That said, people must have known enough about his father, that calling him “son of James” was a useful distinction.

Have you ever been known as “so and so's” child? Or “so and so's” brother or sister? Sometimes it's good and sometimes it's not so great, right? In high school, I was known as “Brad Jernberg's little sister” – which most definitely helped me in choir and theatre, because my brother was a wonderful musician and actor. Being Brad's little sister gave me a name and some status before I even entered those programs and probably helped

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<sup>3</sup> Accessed on June 18, 2023 at <https://www.gotquestions.org/Thaddeus-in-the-Bible.html>.

me get some roles and parts I may not have gotten otherwise.

If we're honest, many of us use these kind of relationship connectors if they are advantageous to us. For example, when I'm at True Food Kitchen (where my husband has worked for years), it's *very* advantageous for me to be known as Damon Scalfaro's wife. That is a GREAT status to have, as it results in free food and special treatment.

So, yes, it can be wonderful to be known in reference to another person – but it can also be hard. Particularly since we have no control over other people's actions – so being identified with another person (even one in our family) can be great one moment and not so great the next. And we often have no control over who people connect us to. Some of you who are part of multi-generational families here at Calvary may want to be known as “so and so's” child or grandchild; others of you may prefer to have your own identity from time to time.

And sometimes identifiers that connect us to others are not flattering or admirable, and in fact may be, embarrassing or

difficult. I discovered on the Civil Rights Road Trip that my family is connected to a Mississippi Senator who was one of the biggest Segregationists and proponents of white supremacist policies in the South. The relationship is four generations above me, my fourth cousin in law. Someone said – well that's not really “your family” (it's a connection by marriage) – but the truth is – it's not the exact family connection that matters to me, it's the fact that my family is in such close proximity to this kind of power that matters to me. It's a connection I cannot ignore. One that holds privilege, and deep and lasting harm. I know as I explore this connection that it will have bearing on how I live my life and what I work for and stand for, and even how I use my financial resources for reparations.

You see, sometimes it's not just our own names that can reveal something to us about who we are and how we are to reveal God's love to the world – but also who we are connected to. These are connecting points to the revelation that God might be inviting us to explore. Though I feel deep sadness about this connection, this is not about feeling guilt or shame. This is



about feeling empowered to recognize my history and how it continues to impact the present and how I can be a part of creating a different future.

What does it mean to you to be YOUR NAME, the child of \_\_\_\_\_, grandchild of \_\_\_\_\_, parent of \_\_\_\_\_, grandparent of \_\_\_\_\_, aunt or uncle of \_\_\_\_\_. Are there ways that God might be speaking to you through your family or geographical connections in terms of what it means to further reveal God's love to the world?<sup>4</sup>

The names we are connected to are important in us knowing who we are, but also who we are not. And if you ever get overwhelmed with these identifiers and what they say or don't say about you, remember this: the only static, unchanging identifier that we can claim over and over again without fear or shame is "*Child of God.*" "*Sister or brother in Christ.*" "*Sibling in the Spirit.*" If you are in a place where you have no other family member that you want to claim by your name or if you are wondering what do to with the names you must claim but whose lives do not

represent the values you espouse – remember the Truth that defines ALL of our names – *God's beloved child*. Lean into that Truth as a place of revealing God's love to the world.

Today's disciples is also known as **Judas, not Iscariot**. This reminds me of when I say "I'm a pastor at Calvary Baptist Church," but we're not THAT KIND of Baptist. This is especially relevant this week as the Southern Baptist Convention has upheld its ban on women pastors and has ousted churches that have women as pastors. They are making a lot of news this week, but honestly – it seems they are often the "Baptists" who make the news. So much so that when people hear "Baptist" they automatically think "Southern Baptist." We've given the public no reason to think otherwise. One wonders what it would be like if "American Baptists" were the ones that were so well known that when a story about the Southern Baptists broke on the news, people would be shocked and confused, saying, "*But I thought Baptists were welcoming and*

<sup>4</sup> For example, during this PRIDE month there are powerful stories of parents advocating for their child's rights, even moving states so they can receive gender affirming care without threat. And – there are stories that

are heartbreaking too – of parents disowning children, homeless LGBTQ+ youth – seeking not just housing, but community, self-worth, and affirmation.

*affirming of women and LGBTQ+ folks?”* But no – the opposite is true. And because we’ve let “Baptist” be defined by “Southern Baptist,” we find ourselves in place of saying what we are NOT, rather than what we ARE – and honestly, in place that requires us or at least tempts us to disparage another Christian body in order to make ourselves look better.

Similarly, in the gospel stories, because Judas Iscariot became known for betraying Jesus, and apparently that was so great a grievance that he was ostracized (at the very least, mentally and emotionally) that he died by suicide and he was forever remembered as “a betrayer” – then that means that anyone else named Judas – *especially* another disciple, *especially* another one of the 12, would have had to have the distinguisher – “*I’m Judas – but don’t worry – I’m not THAT Judas.*”

While we know what the gospel writer was doing saying – Judas, not Iscariot – differentiating him from the one that betrayed Jesus, the fact is – that differentiator defines Judas

Iscariot forever by what he has done (his behavior) rather than by his inherent belovedness.

It's a slippery slope, and one that is easy to catch ourselves on. I found myself just this week, saying, “*I’m not Southern Baptist.*” So trust me, I get it. But I wonder if part of what we might learn from Judas, not Iscariot – is that there is power in creating an identity by what we DO stand for and who we ARE - rather than by what we stand AGAINST or by who we are NOT.

I’m not saying this is a universal truth for all time. There may be times where we must say what we are not or who we do not stand with. But I wonder if sometimes because it’s easier to define what we are not rather than define who we are. And when we do that, I wonder if we take the easy road out – and even might be harming someone else’s belovedness in the process. Food for thought.

Then finally – Judas’ nickname. **Thaddeus**. Or **Labbaeus** in the King James. Thaddeus means “breast child” and Labbaeus means “heart child.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Accessed on June 18, 2023 at <https://www.gotquestions.org/Thaddeus-in-the-Bible.html>.

Scholars suggest that these nicknames indicate that Thaddeus was a gentle soul with a tender, childlike heart. And – that it may even indicate that he was one of the youngest of the 12 disciples...still kind of childlike in stature and nature when he was called to join Jesus. It could even mean that, though he was defined as the son of James, that he was also a “mama’s boy” at heart. We’re not sure – but the nicknames definitely suggest a tenderness to his nature and heart that is worth taking note of.

Nicknames are terms of affection and familiarity. If we’re using a nickname for someone, then that means we really know them well or have some kind of close connection with them. And this is because nicknames arise when we are in relationship with another person. Whether it’s the fact that we’re around someone so much that instead of saying “Jonathon” we just start saying “Jon” for ease and efficiency; OR whether it’s because we add a soft ending to a name to indicate affection or a term of endearment, such as my good friends calling me “Annie” or “Anniejay” instead of “Anne”; OR whether it’s a name not tied

to one’s original name altogether – like my husband Damon’s nickname – which is Buck. That came about because a cellar door knocked out his two front teeth as a kid and it was two years before they grew in and when they did, they grew in crooked and it drew attention to his “buck teeth.” But then the nickname gained even more power when later as a teen and young adult he hit 5 deer in a handful of years, one of them a buck that flew threw his windshield and landed on his lap! Buck has nothing to do with Damon...just like Thaddeus has no connection to Judas...but these types of nicknames really reveal something about the person in how they come about...something that kind of becomes defining about them...even if it is just a great story or a memorable moment.

In this way, Thaddeus, or Labbaeus in the King James, is the kind of nickname that scholars believe came from the qualities of who Judas WAS, instead of who he was NOT, or even who he was RELATED to.

In the end what I’m suggesting is that because we don’t know Thaddeus’ story – perhaps the way we see ourselves in him –

is through his question – and through his names.

What is your name? Who are you connected to? How do people describe you? Do you define yourself by who you are or what you are not? If Jesus were to give you a nickname – what would it be? A term of endearment because of your close relationship? Or a nickname that describes a significant event or a quality of your life and faith that is memorable?

While it might be daunting to realize that God's love is revealed to the world through us – it's also liberating. It means that Change can happen. Transformation is possible.

God can use any of us – and does use all of us – to spread God's message of love to the world. It's not an easy journey; most all the disciples were martyred for their faith, including Thaddeus. But Christ never said it would be easy, he said, *"Take up your cross and follow me."*

Could it be that it's not that Christ is not willing to be revealed to the world, but that Christ is waiting to be revealed to the world through you and

me?

So, Child of God, Brother or Sister in Christ, Sibling in the Spirit – what do you say? *"Let us Rise and be on our way..."*

Amen.