Introduction The Treason of Lord Haw Haw
I was watching this week the old World War 2 movie classic, '12 o’clock High, about the 918th Bomber squadron. And in one scene they’re listening to a broadcast from Berlin of the infamous traitor, Lord Haw Haw. I don’t know if you recognize the name. His real name was William Joyce. He was born in America, and then moved to Ireland as his mother was Irish Catholic. He trained for the army in England, but became attracted in the 1920’s to fascism. At a Conservative Party meeting in 1924 he was attacked with a razor which left a scar right across his right cheek. He blamed Jewish communists for the attack. He fled to Germany just before the war and began regular radio broadcasts of Nazi propaganda into Britain, urging the British to surrender. These broadcasts were known for their sarcastic, sneering menacing tone. It’s estimated that up to 18m people listened to Lord Haw Haw. He was captured after the war and executed, entirely unrepentant. He said, “I am proud to die for my ideals and I am sorry for the sons of Britain who have died without knowing why.”

Some names go down in history. Some you’d wear that with pride, like Florence Nightingale or William Wilberforce. Others you’d wear with shame, and amongst them are the traitors: Lord Haw Haw, Benedict Arnold, Quisling and, of course, Judas.

Today as we continue our journey to the cross in Mark 14 I want to look with you at the betrayal of Judas, and his infamous kiss of death.

It’s striking how recently we’ve been witnessing the redemption of Judas Iscariot. On a popular level it began with the phenomenally successful musical, Jesus Christ Superstar, which was the story of Jesus through the eyes of Judas. If you know the story it starts with Judas who has become increasingly disillusioned with the direction that Jesus’ ministry was taking. Jesus had been doing wonderful works for his people and Judas had enthusiastically dedicated himself to the cause. But now all that’s in danger of being swept away. Judas can’t understand why Jesus, whom he loves and respects, would let himself get sidetracked, and start believing all this talk of him being God. Judas sings, “It was beautiful but now it’s sour.” And he’s concerned that if the movement keeps getting bigger, it will get out of control and people will lose their lives. So, he agrees to hand Jesus over to the Jewish leaders, all the time saying he’s acting out of unselfish motives. And at the end of the musical both he and Jesus die. Jesus dies just confused by who he is and why he’s really come. And Judas dies full of guilt at what he’s done, and worried that history will remember him always as a traitor, when all he wanted was the best.

Of course, the reality of Judas, and the reason for his awful act of treachery is far less heroic and much more sordid.

“One of the Twelve” 14:43-45
Let’s pick up the events from where we left off last week. Remember that Jesus has been praying and asking God for the strength to face the ordeal that’s before him. And now the ordeal begins, or in his own words, “the hour has come” (v.41).

And we’re told, “Just as he was speaking...” barely had the words left his lips, when “Look”, said Jesus, “Here comes the betrayer”. Jesus sees the torches, hears the trampling of the fee, and the
clanging of the swords in their sheathes as the soldiers approach. This is no quiet approach by stealth. There’s no hint that the crowd are trying to sneak up on Jesus. Presumably they have the garden surrounded. There’s no hope of escape and so they just march up. Besides, they’ve no reason to suspect that Jesus has any awareness of their plans. As far as they know, they’ve caught him alone, unguarded and unsuspecting.

And at the head of the crowd is Judas, “one of the Twelve”, says Mark. Nine times Mark uses this expression, one of the 12, and on eight of those occasions it refers to Judas. And it’s clearly meant to emphasise the depth of his betrayal. Had it been a Pharisee or a scribe who’d led the crowd, well, that would be no surprise. Had it even been one from that larger group of disciples, the 72. But one of the Twelve, the specially chosen ones, who’d been with him 3 years.

Let’s just remind ourselves of what Judas had seen over these years:
- he’d seen Jesus calm a storm with a word – ch.4
- heal a demon-possessed man – ch.5
- seen the dead daughter of Jairus walking around
- seen Jesus feed 5000, then later 4000, with a few loaves and a couple of fish – chs.6 & 8.
- seen Jesus walk on water – ch.6
- seen Jesus heal a man who was deaf and dumb – ch.7
- seen Jesus heal a man who was blind – ch.8
- would have heard Peter, James and John describe how Jesus was transfigured on the mountain and met and spoke with Moses and Elijah – ch.9
- seen him curse and wither a fig tree – ch.11.

And, of course, that’s just a smattering of his signs and wonders. And it beggars belief that he – one of the 12 – would do such a thing. To do this to a close friend, your master, mentor, loving leader who went about doing good relentlessly, just beggars belief. But it gets worse.

“Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them” (v.44). Jesus was just hours away from death by crucifixion. Now, crucifixion was a method of execution deliberately intended to maximise and prolong suffering. And we wonder what kind of twisted minds invent these kinds of tortures.

But even worse, I think, is what we see here: “The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.” Of course, it would have been very dark in Gethsemane at that time of night. There were no street lights or lampposts. All the soldiers would have seen are some dark, shadowy figures. And even if those in that crowd had seen and heard Jesus preaching and teaching in the city over the previous few days, in the dark it would have been difficult to identify him from the rest.

And so we can see why Judas felt he needed to point out the one they should arrest. But he could have simply taken a soldier with him and said, “Arrest this man”. But he didn’t. He chose to give a sign and the sign is, probably, the most intimate and affectionate expression of love and friendship human beings have: the kiss. Indeed, the word Mark uses here for kiss is a strong word. It means a fervent kiss, a prolonged kiss. It’s the only time in the Gospels when there is any record of a kiss between Jesus and one of the disciples; although to greet someone with a kiss was a standard greeting, like a handshake. But how ironic, how perverse, then, that it should be the one occasion.
And at this point in the story, Judas disappears. Mark doesn’t bother to tell us what happened to him. Of course, the traditions about his subsequent death would have been well known. But he has served his purpose in the divine plan, and so disappears into history – but we’ll come back to him in a few minutes.

**The Arrest of Jesus 14:46-52**

The soldiers then move in and arrest Jesus. Very briefly, Mark records the cutting off of the servants ear. Jesus points out the cowardice of this crowd: they had ample opportunity, day after day to arrest him in the city, but they’ve come out like rodents and cockroaches under the cover of darkness to do their dirty deed.

"But the Scriptures must be fulfilled..."

Back in v.27, as we saw a couple of weeks ago, Jesus had quoted Zechariah 13:7: “I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered”. And what are Mark’s very next words, “Then everyone deserted him and fled” (v.50).

You see, we have a record here of the evil plans of all those involved in this great miscarriage of justice:

“Rise, here comes my betrayer.” Judas points Jesus out to the crowd by a kiss.

The crowd plot and plan to come against him when he’s alone and defenceless.

They decided beforehand that an arrest in broad daylight, in the city, was a bad idea; it could incite a riot, and so they planned a night attack.

The disciples realize it’s all over. The great Jesus movement has come to a sudden and terrifying halt.

And, of course, the soldiers don’t chase after the disciples because they know that as soon as you cut off the head then the body quickly dies. Kill Jesus and you kill the movement.

All the plots, plans, schemes, reactions, machinations of men and women. But under, above, around and through it all, “But the Scriptures must be fulfilled”.

And then the episode finishes with two verses that have proven some of the most puzzling and elusive to Bible readers for centuries. A a certain young man, nameless, wearing just a linen garment was also there. Who is he? Why’s he dressed, we’d say, in his pyjamas? How’d he get there? Where did he come from?

And when the soldiers appeared to have let all the disciples flee, why try to seize him? And he runs away stark naked. What’s that all about? And what’s the point of this little appendage to the story, anyway?

And the answer to all these questions is nobody really knows. Most have assumed, and this guess is as good as any, is that it was Mark, the Gospel writer. It was his subtle way of telling us he was there, “That’s me. I saw it all. And I ran away, as well”.

And that’s the point of this tiny, enigmatic incident – he ran away as well. Again Mark is emphasizing the point that Jesus was completely alone. Praying in the garden, in deep distress, longing for some support, and every time he turns around the disciples are sleeping. Even before they literally ran away, really they’d deserted him. And in a short while, horror of horrors, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

**Application: Exegeting the Human Heart**
Years ago in a Russian concentration camp, a Gulag, two men met for a brief but historic encounter. One was a Jewish doctor, imprisoned for some minor crime, and a prisoner, like all the others, who came to hate and despise his captors and the vicious system they represented. But unlike most of the other prisoners he was also appalled by the hatred and violence in his own heart. And he came to understand that hatred just spawns more hatred, and that he was trapped in the very evil that he himself despised. And it was at this point that he began to pray a prayer taught to him by a friend, “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” And this prayer led him to desire his own inner cleansing, and led to a decision not just to pray the prayer, but to become a follower of the one who taught the prayer.

So, Dr Boris Kornfeld became a Christian and made a vow to stand against this evil system. He refused to sign the forms doctors were told to sign for the execution of prisoners. He exposed orderlies who were stealing food and medicine. And he made lots enemies.

Two months later Kornfeld examined a prisoner with stomach cancer and he told this man his story. And he couldn’t stop speaking, through the day and into the night. And he said that, in the end, there is no punishment which comes to us which is undeserved. All we see around us is our own creation.

In the morning this patient was woken by the sound of rushing feet. Kornfeld had been bludgeoned to death during the night. The patient’s name was Alexander Solzhenitsyn, and he went on to be the ideological leader of the Russian resistance that eventually brought down the Soviet system. And, like Kornfeld, he became a Christian. And as Solzhenitsyn thought about Kornfeld, and the prison camp, and all the evil, and the good, he famously observed,

> It was only when I lay there on rotting prison straw that I sensed within myself the first stirrings of the good. Gradually, it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either, but right through every human heart, and through all human hearts.

Now, why am I saying this in a talk about Judas? Because it’s easy to look at Judas and to separate ourselves from him. But we can’t because we’re told again and again by Mark, that he was one of the Twelve. He was one of us, and it would be arrogant and foolish to put him in a separate category called the evil. Remember the line that separates good and evil passes through every human heart.

For a long time people have pontificated about the reasons for Judas’ sickening betrayal of Jesus. Was it disillusionment? Or despair? But the Gospel writers agree, it was pure, naked greed. He was a thief.

And we can respond to Judas in one of two ways. We can look at him from a distance, objectively, dispassionately, judging and despising his loathsome conduct and putting him in that other category called ‘the evil’. Or, we can look at him up close, as a fellow disciple, deeply aware that, but for the grace and power of God, we’d be capable of anything just as monstrous, just as despicable and just as wicked. For after all, everyone deserted him and fled.

But Mark’s Gospel doesn’t leave us with Judas, because at the very heart of this little vignette in the garden, as we’ve seen, is the voice of Jesus: “Am I leading a rebellion that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me?” (v.48).
Of course, the answer is ‘no’. Jesus was never armed. He didn’t train his disciples in the art of insurrection and terrorism. He didn’t say, throw off the shackles of Rome. Rather he said, ‘Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s’.

But here’s the great irony: in a profound sense, Jesus was a rebel. He was bringing in a kingdom. And he was challenging the authority of all earthly rulers. Because there is something deeply subversive about a kingdom of love and righteousness, of forgiveness and renewal. A kingdom which calls for moral repentance and radical purity. A kingdom whose weapons are deeds and words of love.

You see, in a real sense, Jesus and his followers were a threat to the Caiaphas’ and the Pilates and the Caesars, and the Stalins and the Maos and the Gaddafis. Any kingdom which captures the hearts and wills of men and women, and turns them, is very dangerous and deeply seditious.

I belong to Australia. But my citizenship is elsewhere. And my true Prime Minister does not live in the Lodge.

So, yes, Jesus was a rebel, and a rebel who leads a revolution that affects a kind of change no government coup or war on terror can ever effect; a revolution of the human heart. A revolution that turns the heart of a Jewish prisoner in a Russian Gulag and that helps to bring down the monstrosity of Soviet communism. That turned, I assume, your heart and mind.

That makes this lovely old church with its appealing bells, its exquisite choir, and its traditional liturgy a dangerous place for those who love the status quo; who live only for this world and, like Judas, ultimately worship at the altar of greed and self-satisfaction.

But we stand here today with the rebel Jesus. Let us never desert him, but in his power continue the revolution he lived, died and rose again to bring about.