

# A Journey with Judas

A Daily Guide through Lent Based on

## Iscariot

by Tosca Lee

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## About Lent

Lent is one of the oldest Christian observances and was mentioned in church writings as early as 130 A.D. In 325, the Nicene Council instituted a formal season of fasting prior to Easter. Lent has traditionally been thought of as the forty days prior to Easter, but how those forty days are counted has varied throughout history and among denominators. In most western traditions, Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Maundy Thursday, a period of approximately 40 days when Sundays are not counted.

Many Christians observe Lent as a period of preparation prior to Easter. During this season they may practice fasting or moderation, and devote extra time to prayer and study.

## About *Iscariot*

New York Times Best Selling Author Tosca Lee has written an intimate portrait of one of Christianity's most reviled characters. Judas spent most of his life searching for a Messiah who would free his people from Roman rule. Judas dedicated himself to the study the scripture and to the keeping of the law. In Jesus, he encountered a man who both awakened his hope and incited his terror. Judas loved Jesus and was the only disciple whom Jesus called "friend." Yet, in the end, Judas delivered Jesus into the hands of those who would crucify him.

In Lee's telling, we come to see both Judas and Jesus in a new light and to grapple with questions of love, loyalty, hope and redemption.

*Iscariot* won 2014 Christian Book of the Year Award for fiction from the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association. It was also named a Top 10 Christian Fiction Title for 2013 by The Library Journal, and received a Lime Award for Excellence in Fiction.

## About This Journey

These short daily readings intertwine Judas' story as envisioned by Tosca Lee with Scripture passages and observations from the writers. We hope it engages thoughts and questions about your own faith journey. We encourage readers to use these devotionals while reading *Iscariot*.

## Day 1: What Would Judas Do?

*You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; You do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.* - Psalm 51:16

This is the beginning.

Of Lent.

Of a journey to explore the familiar story of Easter from a new perspective.

Lent was not a big part of my upbringing. I think our church had communion on Ash Wednesday and Maundy Thursday, the bookends of the season. Many of my friends gave up fish, or chocolate, or television. I sometimes joined in by denying myself some small thing for a few days until the novelty wore off and we moved past our penance to other concerns

As I read *Iscariot*, I pondered what Judas might do with Lent. As a zealous law keeper, I imagine he might find comfort in ritual self-denial. Can I discover a similar succor? I debated whether I should give something up as I embarked on this journey. Everything I thought of -- wine, chocolate, Candy Crush, ESPN -- came from motivations of losing weight or being more productive or feeling less guilty. Somehow, that seemed to miss the mark.

Perhaps what I need to give up during this season are my assumptions. I think I know about Easter. I think I know Jesus. I thought I knew Judas. What if there is a part of the story I've ignored or been afraid to examine? What if God truly wants my thoughtful consideration, my attention to details and possibilities I've overlooked, more than my self-improvement?

So it begins. I will lay my assumptions down and attempt to take a journey in new footfalls. I want Judas to lead me through the last days of Jesus so that I might that which I may have missed.

About Judas.

About Jesus.

About myself.

*-Cindy*

## Day 2: As a Child

*"When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child..."*

- 1 Corinthians 13:11

Six years old.

Tosca opens Chapter 1 of *Iscariot* from the perspective of a six-year-old Judas Iscariot. Judas admires his father and adores his older brother, Joshua. Judas' world feels ordered and secure. Until it isn't

Judas and his family flee Jerusalem and life changes for the six-year-old. The oppression and tragedy the family endures informs Judas' view of himself, of the world, of God.

The passage from 1 Corinthians quoted above goes on to say, "When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me." As we follow Judas through the pages of *Iscariot*, we see it is not so easy to leave the thoughts of childhood behind. The guilt, anxiety and fear felt by the child Judas are never far from the man who follows then betrays Jesus.

The childhood me shapes my thinking more than I care to confess. Yet, Jesus invites -- in fact requires -- us to come to him as children (Matthew 18:2-4). Perhaps that is the only way he can touch and change our six-year-old hearts.

-Cindy

## Day 3: A Good Name

Dylan

Gabriel

Joshua

Nicholas

Once again, Judas did not make the list. I can't remember a year when Judas was listed among the most popular names for baby boys. In fact, I'm sure I've never meant anyone named Judas.

In Tosca's telling, Judas says his name was "once a good name, a strong name, the name of our people." He was named in part for Judas Maccabee, a man considered a great warrior in the vein of Joshua and Gideon.

Now, the name Judas has a different hue.

Judas grew up to work in a respected role in the temple. He valued his name and the honor of his family. When he left the temple and family behind to follow Jesus, he feared he had lost both name and reputation, but it was another choice that accomplished that.

Is there another name so reviled as Judas? Will this name ever be free of its traitor's mark? What name does God have for Judas in the ever after? Is it a good name, a strong name or a name of condemnation?

Perhaps it is the mother's heart in me that longs for the little boy with the warrior name to be restored with a name of forgiveness and grace.

*-Cindy*

## Day 4: We Don't All Agree

*"For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds..."*

-Matthew 7:8

How old were you when you discovered that not everyone believed or thought like you?

I don't recall a moment, but more a growing awareness. About the time I started school I learned that other kids and other families didn't act and think exactly like me. Ricky left the room during the Pledge of Allegiance. Scott didn't participate in the school Christmas party. (We had those back then.) Yvette wore dresses. Everyday. Karen and Doreen and Jon came to school with ashes on their foreheads and gave up fish or candy or TV during Lent. I felt mostly pity for those who didn't do and see life like me. I saw mostly what they couldn't do without understanding anything deeper about their beliefs.

We go back to six-year-old Judas in *Iscaiot*. He was keenly aware that his family's beliefs were not shared by those in power. His family fled their home in fear. Beliefs, for Judas, were very costly.

The world changes when we realize that we are not all the same. It becomes both darker and lighter, more fearful and more beautiful. When belief suddenly requires a price, we are more open to exploring alternatives. We are more compelled to understand our own faith and choose it again -- or deny it -- for ourselves. We begin to see and cherish the depth and meaning of our belief. Our faith becomes not what we can and cannot do (rules) but our very life, even if it is not like everyone else's.

*-Cindy*

## Day 5: Preparation

*"But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him and said, 'Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me.'"*

- Luke 10:40

Lent is one of the oldest Christian observances and was mentioned in church writings as early as 130 A.D. In 325, the Nicene Council instituted a formal season of fasting prior to Easter. It is considered a season of preparation. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* says, "the real aim of Lent is, above all else, to prepare men for the celebration of the death and Resurrection of Christ... the better the preparation the more effective the celebration will be."

Have you ever gotten caught up in preparations for an event or celebration? Most of us have known (or been) brides obsessed with details and plans. Planning a trip, a work meeting, a dinner party, a move can consume us. Just look at [Pinterest](#). When Jesus encountered Martha, she was absorbed in preparation.

Through Lent and through life, we need to keep preparation in perspective. Preparation in itself is not the goal. The goal is to be ready so we can enjoy Jesus when He shows up.

-Cindy



## Day 6: Can we be Clean?

*"And since we have a great priest over God's house, let us come near to God with a sincere heart and a sure faith, because we have been made free from a guilty conscience, and our bodies have been washed with pure water. Let us hold firmly to the hope that we have confessed, because we can trust God to do what he promised."*

- Hebrews 10:21-23

In *Iscariot* Tosca portrays Judas as a man obsessed with being clean. He returns again and again to the mikva, a small pool like the one pictured below, for ritual cleansing. The law required immersion in a mikva to restore and maintain purity. Judas is almost OCD in his commitment to ritual purity.

Unless we are Orthodox Jews, few of us have ritual cleansing pools in our homes or places of worship today, but that doesn't mean we don't have our own obsessions with ritual. Our penance can take the form of berating ourselves for past sins, mentally and spiritually holding ourselves apart from God's grace. We refuse to receive forgiveness and to believe God's promise that he has cleansed us. We hold on to stains that God no longer sees.

This Lent, let Judas' mikva remind us that our cleansing in Christ is complete. Each time Judas returns to the mikva, pause and consider God's invitation, "*let us come near to God with a sincere heart and a **sure** faith, because **we have been made free** from a guilty conscience, and **our bodies have been washed with pure water.**"*

-Cindy

## Day 7: Baptism

*"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for as many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."*

-Galatians 3:26-27

The Greek for the word 'baptizo' means to immerse, plunge, dip, or bury in water.

Were you raised in a church where baptism was taught and practiced? I was raised in a church that baptized infants by sprinkling water on their heads. As an adult I decided to be baptized by immersion because it was important to the church we belonged to, and I understood it was a public acknowledgement of my faith. I didn't think a lot about it afterwards.

As I'm reading *Iscairiot*, I am wondering about John arriving on the scene baptizing people.

I wonder why John began his ministry as "the baptizer"? The practice of immersion was a critical ritual in the life of the devout Jew. How do you think they might have responded to John and his baptism? Would they find it threatening or just different?

-Barb

## Day 8: Finding Our Non-Negotiables

*"For the law was given by Moses, [but] grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."*

-John 1:17

How important is it that God's people are in agreement? What key beliefs in your Christian life have evolved over time? Are there some things that you once believed were mandatory, that don't seem as important now?

Many years ago, I attended a church that was embroiled in disagreement over the style of music in the service. People on both sides of this issue felt strongly about their stance, and I often wonder if they look back and regret the energy and effort spent defending their preferred style.

In *Iscariot*, the church leaders were threatened by John, and then Jesus. Were the religious leaders doing what they thought was right by defending the regulations and customs of their time, or were they afraid of losing power and prestige?

What are some beliefs or actions that you consider non-negotiable to having an authentic faith? Consider asking God to show which of your beliefs might require some grace and which beliefs or actions must be considered mandatory.

What do you think of the following statement by Rupertus Meldenius? "In Essentials Unity, In Non-Essentials Liberty, In All Things Charity."

-Barb

## Day 9: Do Credentials Matter?

*"John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins."*

-Mark 1:4-5

In Chapter 9 of Tosca's book, the Sadducees go to John demanding answers for their masters in the ruling houses. "Their report was rife with accusation. How do you claim to forgive sins? Are you a priest?"

I have been thinking about the church rulers who were outraged when John claimed that people were forgiven of their sins, saying, "Who is he to forgive sin?" It seems to me that if I were drowning in a lake and someone came along and rescued me, I wouldn't have a lot to gain by questioning their credentials. I can't imagine asking for their Red Cross swimming card before allowing myself to be rescued! No, I would be clinging to them for dear life, grateful that they were caring enough to offer assistance.

I have to ask myself if I have preconceived ideas in my faith journey that could cause me to miss the truth when it looks different from what I expected.

-Barb

## Day 10: Sincere, Outrageous Love

*"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another..."*

-John 13:34-35

In Chapter 10 of *Iscariot*, Jesus heals a leper. I was struck by the description of Jesus and his compassion. "Not the perfunctory gaze of the physician... but the caress of the one moved to weeping over the sight of something beautiful."

Jesus was known by his love. He made people feel loved. This sincere, outrageous love moved his followers and threatened his enemies.

As I nurse, I occasionally encounter illness and death. I have learned to shield my heart to prevent myself from falling apart when patients lose their battle with disease. After reflecting on the story of Jesus in *Iscariot*, I feel compelled to examine that notion. I realize that it may be desirable to let my heart be broken when a patient suffers.

True compassion and love exposes us to pain, and it opens our heart to experience deep suffering on behalf of another. Is it worth the risk?

-Barb

## Day 11: Our Journey is Only as Good as Our Questions

*"...turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding—indeed, if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God."*

-Proverbs 2:2-5

Reading *Iscaiot* has been important to my faith. It has brought life and intrigue to a story most of us could recite by memory; a story so comfortable and yet so confusing. It has caused me to spend hours reading this story in the Bible, and thinking about it in new light.

I am impacted by explanation of customs and the culture. Sometimes when you see the way a culture lives and functions, it brings a new understanding. My husband and I recently moved to Europe where the custom of greeting friends and family with a kiss to the face, or even each side of the face is very common and expected part of etiquette. (This is NEVER done in our home culture!) So it makes more sense when I read that Jesus and the disciples greeted each other with a kiss.

It seems to me that our journey of faith is only as good as the questions we ask, and the way we look at comfortable and familiar routine and rituals. Reading or hearing another person's perspective gives us opportunity to see something new, or understand something more completely.

What part of this story are you confident that you know and understand? What would cause you to see something new? I wonder how we find the balance in the sacred unchanging part of our faith, and how we remain willing and open to new ways of seeing.

-Barb

## Day 12: Power and Position

*"For he that conducts himself as a lesser one among all of you is the one that is great."*

Luke 9:46-48

According to [bibleinfo.com](http://bibleinfo.com), there are more than one hundred verses in the Bible about humility.

Much of chapter 12 in *Iscariot* revolves around Jesus' attitude on humility. We see the comparison between the repentant tax collector who went home that day justified before the Lord, and the proud and unrepentant Pharisee. Jesus said, "All those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

In the culture of Jesus' day, the social hierarchy was very structured. It was unthinkable for a tax collector, or a prostitute, or a poor person to receive more respect than a teacher, Rabbi, or Pharisee.

I wonder how I would have responded to these teachings about humility. I likely would have feared giving up any position I had earned in the social structure. Once social stature was lost, it could not be recovered, and it affected everything about life in the community.

I wonder what we would worry about surrendering if Jesus were teaching in our churches today. Would he ask for our power, and our money, or would he ask us to be open to the opinions of people whose agendas threaten ours? I know it would be the unexpected, and likely something that seemed sacred until he surprised us and caused us see it in a different way.

*-Barb*