

Four people die in this story: three by nails on a cross, and one by a rope on a tree. The death of Judas is perhaps the most tragic. Every suicide is.

Why did Judas betray Jesus? Matthew says it was greed. Judas kept the apostles' money; they knew he stole from it. When the priests set a bounty on Jesus' head, Judas claimed it, thirty shekels. In Old Testament times if an ox gored your slave you could receive 30 shekels. That's what they gave Judas--money for a dead slave.

There is a moment of hope here. Judas witnesses the trial and feels remorse. He returns to the priests to confess the innocence of Jesus and the guilt of Judas. The priests could have taken the money back; they could have ordered a new trial; they could have saved Judas's life. But they rejected him. They wanted Jesus, not justice.

Judas abandoned hope. He flung the money in the temple and hanged himself. He gave up on forgiveness, even as Jesus bestowed forgiveness to the world. All this happened to one of Jesus' 12 closest friends. No one is above sin. No one is removed from tragedy.

My brothers and sisters, it is Holy Week. If we have sinned, let us confess it. If we are withholding forgiveness, let us grant it. Let us nail tragedy to the cross, so that hope may live.