

# When God kissed the world

*Judas got a bad rap, but are we all that much different?*



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## CROSS CULTURE

It's easier to kiss a lamb than a lion, I suppose, even though I've personally never tried to kiss either.

Even in Africa all these years, I've never been that close to a lion. And the closest lamb I've seen is one moved recently from a living room wall to the bedroom, an innocent little lamb held by a Yemeni shepherd girl in a striking photo given to me by my wife shortly after we met.

Judas, on the other hand, giver of history's best-known kiss, kissed what he thought was a lamb while crossing his fingers that it, or, more accurately, that "He" might still turn into a lion.

It's easy to be hard on Judas for this. He's had a bad rap for a long time.

But Judas wasn't chosen into Jesus' preaching and healing posse, as treasurer no less, because he was some fool. If he didn't have as much potential as the rest of the 12, most who were later martyred for turning the world upside-down (Peter with the ignoble honour of crucifixion upside-down) then Jesus wouldn't have bothered.

But Jesus did bother with Judas. He called him friend and confidant and showed him the secrets of the world.

The problem, if we believe one long-held speculation, is that Judas was terribly disappointed. He expected Jesus to lead a revolution more like Zeus would, thunderbolt in hand. Plenty of others wanted the same, the political overthrow of Rome.

But time dragged and the sorry truth eventually emerged. Judas would see no kingly crowning of this Messiah, no ministerial post in the new messianic government, no BMW, no fine-dining, no glory, no,

not in this sense.

So after that dark kiss in the garden, Judas finally let go of everything, including the blood money, those silver coins left rolling on the floor, and ran off to hang himself.

Had he stuck around another day, he'd have seen worse, how this Jesus who'd healed the sick and raised the dead and had a freakish power over all nature, really, how this God-Man would also, on a cross, hang dead.

This is the Judas who's easy to write off, easy to turn our backs on.

But don't we all prefer our messiahs to show their power when we're in a jam? Then when they don't, isn't anyone disappointed? Doesn't anyone want justice? And other things?

I do. Before breakfast if possible.

You have to wonder about this beaten, old world and all the injustices piled over the centuries—here in Africa, there where you are, anywhere, really. You have to wonder about where Judas' story might have gone if he'd fought his fight while a

little less full of his own expectations and a little more open to a God of other ways.

You have to wonder, too, where any of our stories might go if we were a little less like Judas.

They call it good news for a reason, though. One is that God is not intimidated by any cruel kiss, or by arrogance or anything else. He's not even beyond going to hell and back.

Then Sunday came with a different revolution, one of the human heart. Because God loved the world. You might even say God kissed the world.

Yes, at Easter God kissed the world back with a wild and ferocious kiss, so unafraid that He even gave His Son, His precious Son, to take away the sins of Judas. And to take away the sins of us who aren't really much different.

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# The Stuff of Troubadours: Lent

*Holy Week, Eastertide*



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## PILGRIM'S YEAR

More than once I've been referred to as a modern-day troubadour. I've always liked this designation because it has a romantic, archaic ring to it that sounds just a little bit more intriguing than mere singer/songwriter. But it once occurred to me that I wasn't entirely sure of its meaning, and I thought I should look it up.

Not surprisingly, I discovered the word to have various historical uses and nuances. But the definition that intrigued me most, and which I recognize as fairly accurate of my own sense of calling and vocation is this:

Troubadour: a lyric poet sent by one (usually of the King's court) with a message of chaste love to another.

Well... there you go. A few years

ago (on Valentine's Day) I posted a song and message of chaste love in a blog. In it, I celebrated thirty years of marriage to my wife Nanci—a union that has resulted in three beloved (now adult) children, their own unions to beloved others, two grandchildren, and a deeply meaningful, long-term foster relationship with a young woman and her beautiful children.

Although not every chaste union strives to produce offspring, Fr. Gabrielle of St. Magdalen, in his meditative devotional *Divine Intimacy*, teaches that the highest glory of the chaste union is in its potential to become a willing "collaborator with God in the transmission of life." That is: a relationship that is materially fecund, suggesting a dark loamy richness capable of concealing and safeguarding a vulnerable seed, and providing a nutrient-rich soil from which it can spring to its own leafy uniqueness. It's a lovely image.

Ironically, what struck me recently is that Valentine's Day is celebrated at the very onset of the season of Lent. And Lent,

in contradistinction to Valentine's, is essentially a season where the Christian "faithful" penitently consider the devastating disaster that is infidelity—particularly infidelity to God, and by extension to all that God is in faithful relationship with.

One of the scriptural texts the Church reflects on during Lent is the Old Testament book of Hosea, in which the author imaginatively portrays God as despair-raged lover whose beloved has been unfaithful with "declarations of love that last no longer than morning mist and pre-dawn dew" (6:4). If you read the text as a propositional description of God, it can be a rather disturbing image as God keens agonizingly one minute, and rages menacingly the next. It is almost a frightening glimpse of someone who, in his frantic desperation, maniacally flops between desperate pleading on one hand, and threatening violence on the other.

But for those concerned with the violence of God apparent in Old Testament Scriptures, please note how the story goes. Admittedly, the text

allows for painful rage, resulting from betrayal, to be voiced. In short, the text is comfortable with the truth: "I'll charge like a lion, like a leopard stalking in the brush. I'll jump like a sow grizzily robbed of her cubs..." (13:7-8). But in the end, God cannot wield the vengeance he threatens. God eventually spends his rage and collapses in exhaustion back into his covenant character, admitting almost with a sheepish sigh:

"I will love... lavishly. My anger is played out." (14:4)

As we leave Lent and enter into the 50 days of Eastertide—all pointing to Trinity Sunday, the celebration of God's loving com-unity—we would do well to consider deeply the content of this "lavish love" which, according to John's gospel, gave itself for the "ton kosmon"—the whole cosmos—as a saving antidote to the devastating infidelity of we, her chief stewards. The entire Lent-Holy Week-Easter sequence is truly an epic love story flanked elegantly by Valentine's Day and Trinity Sunday. And this is the stuff of troubadours.