Each year since 1970 at Madam Tussaud’s Wax Museum in London England thousands of international visitors are asked to name which person, past or present, real or fictional they hated or feared the most. The name that has topped the list the most number of times has been Adolph Hitler, his name was replaced with Osama Bin Laden in 2001. But through the years it has included Idi Amin, Richard Nixon, Margaret Thatcher, Jack the Ripper a few years ago Liam Gallagher front man for the British rock band Oasis made the list, I wonder what he had done? But as far as I can tell Judas Iscariot has never made the list and that surprised me. I mean think about it, this was the man who betrayed Jesus Christ, the son of God, King of Kings, Lord of Lord, Prince of Peace. His name is synonymous with betrayal. None of the other eleven disciples made Collins English Dictionary, but Collins defines Judas as “Judas Iscariot, the disciple who betrayed Jesus, a traitor or betrayer.”

If immortality was Judas’ goal he certainly achieved it. Really people just don’t like Judas or what he did. When was the last time you saw a Saint Judas Church? And a few years back when Biblical names were the flavour of the month for children’s names remember? We had Jepthaths and Joshuas, Joshias and Jeremiahs and Aarons and Levis and Obadiahs, but you never heard anyone naming their bouncing baby boy, Judas.

For that matter you might remember that Jesus younger brother’s name was Judas. But when he wrote the letter that would eventually become a part of our New Testament he used the diminutive of his name which was Jude. Now we don’t read the books of I and II Pete or I and II and III Jack, so why was it that Judas felt that he had to shorten his name to Jude? Because he didn’t want to be identified with Judas Iscariot, would you?

But who was he? Who was this Judas Iscariot? Well we don’t really know all that much about him, we do know that his father was Simon and that his surname Iscariot was probably a combination of the Hebrew words Ish and Kariot, which would then be translated, Man of Kariot. From the scriptures we discover that he was appointed treasurer of the twelve and that he became a thief, stealing from that very same treasury. But what would compel a man to sentence his closest friend to one of the most horrible deaths imaginable?

There have actually been six reasons suggested as to why Judas might have betrayed Christ.

1) **He was an Outsider** Being from Kaerrioth Judas would have been the only non Galilean in the group. I may be that he grew bitter over being odd man out and that drove him to his dastardly deed.

2) **He was a Coward** It may be that he turned crowns evidence to save his own skin and then saw the enormity of what he had done.

3) **He was Greedy** Maybe plain and simply he did it out of greed. He did it for the money. He probably would have denied that, but you know what they say, when anyone says it’s not about the money, it’s about the money. One commentator estimated that the thirty pieces of silver would have been worth close to $1,600.00 today. Not a bad piece of change for an evenings work. Sometimes money talks so loud that it can’t be ignored.

4) **He was Nasty** It could well be that Judas came to hate Christ because he couldn’t hide his inner self from Christ. Other’s looked at Judas and saw one of Jesus’ disciples a good man, a kind man, but Jesus saw him for who he truly was and so he had to destroy the one who saw into the darkest corners of his heart.

5) **He was a Patriot** It might be that Judas’ last name wasn’t a derivative of the Hebrew Ish Kariot as much as it was a form of the Greek word that meant “Dagger Bearer.” Now the Dagger Bearers were a band of violent nationalists who were prepared to use every means available to them, including assassination to free Palestine from Roman rule. Perhaps Judas had set his hopes on a Messiah who would deliver his people from his oppressors. And then in bitter disappointment he betrayed him.

6) **He was Naive** More likely than not though, Judas never intended for Jesus to die that day, instead he hoped to force his hand, so that when he was betrayed he would use his power to liberate Israel. If that was the case then what a tragedy Judas witnessed when he saw he plan fly all to pieces.

Judas Iscariot; friend, confident, disciple, treasurer, traitor. How it must have broken Jesus heart when Judas stepped out of the crowd of those who came to arrest him and betrayed him with a kiss on the cheek.

The name Judas will go down in history being synonymous with betrayal. But the question we need to ask ourselves on Easter Sunday 2009 is this, When Judas hung himself on that day what did he miss?

If we go back to the text that was read earlier we read in Matthew 27:5 Then Judas threw the silver coins down in the Temple and went out and hanged himself.

But if we keep reading we discover that Judas hung himself even before Christ was sentenced. Before Pilate finished questioning Jesus, Judas was dead. Before Barabbas was released, Judas was dead. Before Jesus was scourged with the whip, Judas was dead. Before the crown of thorns was pushed onto Jesus’ head, Judas was dead. Before they nailed Jesus to the cross, Judas was dead.

But the real tragedy is this, that when Jesus looked down from the cross, at those who had mocked him, and spit on him, at those who had slapped him and struck him. When Jesus saw those who had pulled his beard, who had beat him, had jammed that viscous crown of thorns deep into his forehead and nailed him to the cross. When Jesus looked at he mob and cried out in Luke 23:34 Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.” And the soldiers gambled for his clothes by throwing dice.Judas was already dead by his own hand.

And so the first and the most important thing that Judas missed was the **Forgiveness** of Jesus Christ. Now you may be one of those who believe that was Judas did was so heinous, and so horrible that Judas could never have been forgiven. But my bible still contains 2 Peter 3:9 The Lord isn’t really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent.

Did you catch that? The Lord is not wanting anyone to perish. Anyone, not even Judas. Just as it was Judas’ decision to betray Christ, so it was Judas’ choice to die unrepentant and go to hell. To write off the possibility that Judas Iscariot could not obtain forgiveness for his actions is scary. You see Christ’s forgiveness is not dependent on our behaviour, and for that matter it doesn’t even matter whether or not we deserve it.

The forgiveness that each one of us needs is dependent on one thing and one thing only and that is the Grace of God. Grace has been defined as the unmerited, undeserved or unearned love of God. And surely Judas needed undeserved love as much or more then the rest of us.

You know the saddest part of the story is that Judas came so close to forgiveness. If we were to list the three things that are required from us in order to experience the forgiveness of God, they would be 1) Acknowledgment of our sin 2) A sense of remorse for our sin. 3) Acceptance of the forgiveness offered us, by faith.

So how close did Judas come? Matthew 27:4 “I have sinned,” he declared, “for I have betrayed an innocent man.” “What do we care?” they retorted. “That’s your problem.” There was the acknowledgment of his sin. Judas didn’t try to justify himself, and offer up excuses for what he had done. “Well, really, they knew who he was and it was just a matter of time until they came to arrest him anyways.” And he didn’t try to rationalize his guilt, “Well how was I to know that they were going to hurt him, let alone crucify him?” Instead he said “I have sinned, for I have betrayed an innocent man.”

In verse three of that same chapter we read these words, Matthew 27:3 When Judas, who had betrayed him, realized that Jesus had been condemned to die, he was filled with remorse. So he took the thirty pieces of silver back to the leading priests and the elders.

Now most of us have felt remorseful over some particular wrong in our life at one time or another. But usually only after we’ve been caught. For the most part we are like King David who cried out “I have sinned against the Lord” but he only said that after Nathan had confronted him with his adultery and murder. How many of you remember Jimmy Swaggert’s tearful plea that was played so often on the news after he had been caught in adultery and in tears he confessed “I have sinned.” Well we knew that Jimmy.

And yet even with Judas’ acknowledgement of his sin, and his remorsefulness, he still couldn’t bring himself to ask for forgiveness. And while two out of three might be alright in some cases, it just don’t cut it when it comes to eternity.

There are people in churches all over Metro and maybe right here today who know the truth of Romans 3:23 For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard. They know that, and they are remorseful, they feel really bad about their sin. But for some reason they just can’t bring themselves to seek forgiveness from Christ.

I don’t know what it is holding them back, whether it’s pride or stubbornness but I do know that it’s a dangerous game to play, because you don’t have to hang yourself to miss the forgiveness of Jesus Christ.

Three days after Jesus and Judas died, Jesus rose again, but Judas was still dead. And as Christ appeared to the disciples after his resurrection he made a statement that would never apply to Judas. In John 20:19 That Sunday evening the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them! “Peace be with you,” he said.

And so the second thing that Judas missed was **Peace.** Peace, oh how that quality eluded Judas. He seemed to have lived without it and now it would appear that he died without it. That peace that Christ promised his disciples in John 14:27 “I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don’t be troubled or afraid. Even then it was just hours until Judas’ lips would touch his cheek in betrayal.

I wonder if Judas was struggling with his decision even as Christ spoke about peace. I wonder if even then he was craving a peace that would never be his. The world can never give you that peace and that is why suicide is the second greatest killer of Canadians aged 15-44. That’s why teen suicide has increased so sharply over the past twenty years. We look happy, and everyone may think we have the world by the tail, but we know deep down that we don’t. We alone know whether or not we have that peace.

You know it’s easy to externalize a peace, to put on a mask. Felix Powell was the composer of “Pack up your troubles in your old kitbag and smile, smile, smile.” It was once called the most optimistic song ever written, and yet Powell died by his own hand. Every year in Canada close to 4000 men, women and children take their own lives, why? Because often they are missing a critical ingredient and that is peace.

Paul wrote in the letter that he wrote to the Christians in the city of Philippi these words , Philippians 4:7 Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

If you have that peace then you know what I’m talking about, but have you ever tried to explain the depth of that peace to someone who hasn’t experienced it? They just look at you funny.

You see when most people talk about peace they think about what’s going on in the Middle East. But the peace that the Bible talks about isn’t just an absence of war. The Greek word for peace is I-ray-nay which literally means “To set at one again”

And it deals primarily with broken relationships. When we are granted forgiveness through the grace of God then our relationship with God is restored. We are brought to the place where we belong. Judas missed that restoration. Though he was a man who was torn apart with conflict, the method that he chose to resolve the conflict really wasn’t a viable option at all. Suicide doesn’t solve problems, it simply creates them.

It is very doubtful that Judas was able to say at his point of death the same words that Christ used, “Father, I entrust my spirit into your hands!”

Judas didn’t damn himself at the point of betraying Christ. But he most certainly did when he refused to set the relationship straight. I am convinced that had Judas sought the forgiveness that only Christ can give, then he would have experienced the peace that only God can provide.

One thing that most commentators will agree on it that Judas was a fervent nationalist. He was looking for an end to the Roman Tyranny and Jewish enslavement and he thought the answer lay in Jesus. The third thing that Judas missed was **Power.** I’m sure that if you asked Judas what was the one thing that he craved, his answer would have been power. Power to make a difference, power to affect change, power to get done the things that needed doing. He would have agreed with Ashleigh Brilliant who said “All I want is a warm bed and a kind word and unlimited power.” And yet his pathetic demise would bring to mind a lot of images, but power wouldn’t be one of them.

When Judas came to the end of his relatively short life, he felt so powerless to cope with the events which engulfed him, most of which were his own doing, that he took what seemed to be the easiest way out and added to his sins the breaking of the sixth commandment, “You shall not kill.” Judas was so caught up in his own problems, that he missed the one thing that he craved the most. Because forty days after Judas died, Jesus made this promise to the remaining eleven disciples in Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Within ten days of that promise a power of unparalleled magnitude swept into the world. And Judas missed the one thing that had driven his life, power. The power that Christ gave to the disciples was a world changing power, a power that could only be described using the Greek word dunamos, the same root word from which we get words like dynamic, dynamo and dynamite.

The same power that Judas so desired but missed is available to every one of us. The church in general today doesn’t lend itself to images of power, we’ve been relegated to the back burner of society. We’re no longer a force to be reckoned with. But let’s be truthful, is that because the power of the Holy Spirit is any less available or any less powerful today? Or is it because we fail to claim and exercise that power?

Judas missed a lot, he missed the forgiveness of Christ, the peace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, but I’m here today to tell you that you don’t have to. All that Judas missed is available to you this morning. Christ forgiveness is just as thorough today as it was 2000 years ago and you haven’t’ done anything so vile that Jesus can’t forgive you. The peace of God still surpasses understanding in 2009 and the power of the Holy Spirit can still change our world as effectively as it changed the world of Peter and Paul.

But just as Judas had to make the choice for himself, you will have to make the choice for yourself.