



The Parish Churches of S Philip and S Augustine and S Matthew with S Mary the Virgin Newcastle

Homily for Holy Tuesday (31st March) 2026

Judas Iscariot is a cardboard figure in the Gospel narratives - a picture of venality. There is, however, an interesting detail in Saint John's account, when, during the events of the Last Supper, he is identified as the son of Simon Iscariot. It is, perhaps, a curious moment to introduce this information; but it might give us pause for thought.

As I have mentioned previously, people who engage in the analysis of New Testament texts, sometimes argue that the inclusion of a name - particularly one peripheral to the action, permits a tentative presumption that the person named would have been known to the audience.

In this case, we are probably not talking about the readers of the final form of the Gospel, because Simon Iscariot would likely have been long dead by then. Rather, his name was embedded in the early material from which the author or authors of the Fourth Gospel subsequently wove the narrative. In other words, the Christian community in or around the time of the Crucifixion might have been acquainted with him.

This might come as no surprise, since the circle around Jesus seems to have comprised a number of family relationships. So, we might wonder, was Simon Iscariot, like Judas, a follower of Jesus and what it would have been like for him to be the father of his notorious son.

We need to remember that there might have been rather more of a time-lag between Jesus' arrest and the events of Calvary and His Resurrection. It is possible that Simon, like so many others, just melted away, never to return. However, equally, he might have returned to the nascent Church in the wake of the first Easter.

It is, of course, possible that he shared his son's perspective - or his son shared his - and approved of what Judas went on to do; but if not, would he have simply disowned his son's memory? Such a course is not difficult to imagine for these frenetically zealous days, lived in the glow of the Resurrection - and maybe mindful of Jesus' dictum, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."

Or would he, perhaps, have lived with the shame? We can easily imagine a person in such circumstances making strenuous efforts to demonstrate not only his dismay, but also his own unwavering commitment to the Christian community, because there is, of course, the other side of the equation - the attitude of the other members of the Church.

Whilst we might like to think from a great distance that there would have been understanding and sympathy, the history of the Church suggests that this could not be taken for granted. Even if other Christians resisted the impulse to consider him tainted by association with his son, they might have been beholden to the philosophy encapsulated by one of Judge Judy's favourite aphorisms that the apple does not fall far from the tree. In the spirit of our own times, maybe they were interested in what Simon might have known about his son's intentions and actions.

All of this is completely speculative in terms of Simon Iscariot; his name might have been preserved through sheer serendipity and there is nothing more to be made of it than that. All the same, musing on what life might have been like for him, if he had been a Christian, reflecting on how that worked out for him after the actions of his son holds up something of a mirror to Christian communities of every generation and how they respond to people who find themselves in similar or comparable circumstances.