

Enter Satan

The Gospel of Luke turns the corner in Chapter 22. Instead of Judas being annoyed or disturbed about Jesus' behavior—as in John—he is suddenly possessed.

By [Martha Spong](#)

April 12, 2017

When I was a student at an Episcopal girls' school, there was a column in the student newspaper entitled, "The Devil Made Me Do It." For this middle schooler, the phrase had no prior meaning—I'm sure it was meant to be hilarious, some account of youthful antics written by a popular upper school girl—which left me feeling vaguely distressed. What had a big girl done? And can the devil really be responsible for our mistakes? In the household where I was raised, you didn't blame anyone else if you got in trouble. In fact, I remember getting the blame even for things I hadn't done often enough that I began wondering if I had done the things for which other kids at school got in trouble.

If only I had been leaning on Luke's account of Holy Week, I might have felt less perpetually guilty.

By means of an inverted Deus Ex Machina, the Gospel of Luke turns the corner in Chapter 22. We don't hear about Judas being annoyed or disturbed over Jesus' behavior, as we would in John. Instead he is suddenly possessed and the story moves forward as if inevitable.

The Festival of Unleavened Bread, which is called Passover, was approaching. The chief priests and the legal experts were looking for a way to kill Jesus, because they were afraid of the people. Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, who was one of the Twelve. He went out and

discussed with the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard how he could hand Jesus over to them. They were delighted and arranged payment for him. He agreed and began looking for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them—a time when the crowds would be absent. ([Luke 22:1-6, CEB](#))

In Sunday School this week, we talked about whether this outcome was a plan on God's part. I wish I had said, when arguing against it, that it seemed unlikely God would collude with Satan in carrying off a dreadful scheme against Jesus. Judas won't get to blame the devil. He's going to pay the price for his own sinful action. He won't be spared because God had it planned this way all along.

For some people the idea that God is in charge of everything is comforting. For them, it seems obvious and somehow excusable that God would send Jesus to die, that death was always the plan.

I don't believe it, cannot believe it. I believe in a God powerful enough to redeem us without sending his Son to the cross. It played out this way because people couldn't handle having God in their midst. Of course God had the victory over death and sin in the resurrection, but I don't think that means Jesus' death was inevitable. It was only horribly likely.

The Gospel really doesn't make the case for the kind of vicarious atonement held true by many Christians. Luke, in the writing, needed the twisted plot, the entry of personified evil, to make sense of it all. Enter Satan, who made Judas do it. Enter the Devil who makes us do it. Why confess? Jesus will cover it.

No.

I don't believe in this either. The human mind clearly has the capacity for exceptional cruelty and hatred and torture, not to mention blasé injustice, without any help from the supernatural. Just read the headlines.

I wish, in this Holy Week, we would look to Jesus instead, to his witting action and gentle courage and abiding love. Imagine a world that embraces that kind of redemption, not a free pass from our responsibility, but saving grace from bigotry and brutality, a rebirth of mercy and love.

Originally posted at [Spong's blog](#)