

Luke 23:32-34 Repent: Turn to Jesus; He Longs to Forgive You! Evening Lent 4 3/22/ 2017

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God the Father's grace and peace are yours through the forgiveness won by Jesus, your Savior. Amen

Today we will hear Jesus' words from the cross in Luke 23:32-34

Lord, use these words to help us better value the depth and height of Jesus' forgiveness. Your Word is truth.

Dear Christians, living in Christ's forgiveness,

All of us must deal with changes in life. We trade in old technology for the newer. We get new clothes because fashions change or our waistlines change. We start out as infants and then go to childhood, adulthood, and to old age. Change is a part of life. Jesus, as true man, made changes too. He changed his home from Bethlehem to Nazareth. He was born, grew in stature and wisdom and matured as a man. He changed His work: from carpentry to teaching. He enjoyed changes of pace: attending festivals in Jerusalem with huge crowds or at other times withdrawing to lonely places. He was accustomed to the changes in life!

And yet, Scripture tells us that "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*" (*Hebrews 13:8*) What doesn't change in Him? His love never changes because it doesn't depend on us but on His grace. He isn't kind one day and full of vengeance the next or forgiving one day and resentful the next. His love was so great that He went to the cross to die for us when we were His enemies.

Repent: Turn to Jesus; He longs to forgive you!

He even forgave while on the cross. Luke is brief about the crucifixion! He wrote, "*They crucified him there.*" The gospels' descriptions of Jesus' crucifixion are all so brief that it's easy to miss the meaning of what happened! The Lord of life willingly took on flesh to die our death! He felt pain piled upon pain in our place. How easy it is to dismiss the humiliation that Christ endured: no robe of heavenly light, but a bloodied body; no saints with Him, but two criminals; no angels to serve Him, but Israel's leaders were mocking Him. It was a terrible torture, humiliation, and a disgusting death – all packed into that one phrase: "*They crucified him.*" Everything changed for Jesus on the day He died.

And yet, Jesus' grace toward us did not change. Usually when criminals were crucified, they cursed people and then begged for mercy until their voices gave out. But it didn't happen to Jesus! There were no curses or begging for mercy! Instead, we hear Him confidently praying to His Father: "*Forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.*" In the worst of circumstances Jesus' grace toward us did not change!

Jesus often had forgiven people! He saw a paralyzed man on a mat, forgave the man's sins, and proved His forgiveness by healing the man who went home leaping for joy. (*Luke 5:24-25*) Another time, the Jews brought a woman caught in adultery and wanted Jesus to have her stoned to death. But, He forgave her and told her to go and leave her life of sin. (*John 8:11*) Also, Jesus handed over the keys to His disciples, not to a car but to heaven. He gave them the authority to forgive sins in His name. (*Matthew 16:19*) Jesus even taught His disciples to pray, "*Forgive us our trespasses and we forgive those who trespass against us.*" Forgiveness was Jesus' mission. Since God's pardon was won at the cross, it is not surprising that Jesus' first words from the cross were words of forgiveness.

Who was Jesus willing to forgive when He said, "*Father, forgive them*"? We think of the Roman soldiers who drove the spikes into Jesus' hands. For them, it was just another day in a soldier's life. But Jesus saw them as men in need of His pardon, not only for the guilt of crucifying Him but for all their sins.

Jesus' forgiveness was not only for soldiers. He prayed to forgive the leaders who plotted against Him. His pardon reached out to Pontius Pilate, who tried to wash Jesus' innocent blood from his hands. Jesus' forgiveness extended to the men who beat him, spit on him, struck him on the head, and mocked him with a thorny crown and a purple robe. His forgiveness stretched out to the Jerusalem crowds who had screamed "Crucify Him!" Soldier, governor, priest, criminal, disciple, Jew, Gentile, man or woman, rich or poor, believer or unbeliever, and we can go all the way to Adam down to the last person to live. Jesus asked His Father to forgive them all! "*God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son.*" (John 3:16)

Some would say, of course God loves good people that are kind to children or doctors who save lives. God loves good churchgoing people. He adores good people like us here in church tonight! But Jesus said that God loved the world of people. How is the world of people responding to His love? Well, too often we hear on the news: "murder trial set for man who sold heroin that killed a teenage girl", "crazed man yells 'I killed demons' after murdering a pastor", "explosions kill 100 people in a marketplace", "middle school girls attack classmate", "IRS reports thieves scamming elderly of millions of dollars. Murderers, thieves, liars, and destroyers of life and liberty in the name of religion: God loves them all!

The thieves and terrorists aren't sitting in our church pews right now or standing in the pulpit. You and I are here. As we hear Jesus' words: "*Father, forgive them*" we should say: "Jesus, forgive us!" We love to sing about God's amazing grace for us, but also we are so easily filled with anger toward our neighbor. God loves us? Are our hands always eager to help or have we left our brothers and sisters standing alone with their needs and offering no healing for their hurts. Can God really love us? We have all been so accustomed to the world's filthy standards around us that we don't even notice the offenses against our God. Yet, God loves us? The night before his death, Jesus told his disciples, "*Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.*" (John 15:13) Christ's death turns enemies into friends, sinners into saints, and us into God's sons and daughters.

Be of good cheer, for God's own Son forgives the sins that you have done. And justified by Jesus' blood; baptized, you are a child of God. (CW 391:4) There is no debt of sin so great that Jesus' sacrifice does not cover it. There is no weight of guilt that Jesus' cross does not lift from us. Jesus' forgiveness has completely erased every past sin. His shame gives us a robe of righteousness. His outstretched arms on the cross become a shelter from the verdict we deserve. His forgiveness brings peace. Adam reached out his hand to eat forbidden fruit and brought death. Jesus stretched out his hands on the cross to bring life.

This is what we are to take home with us today: Christ's sacrifice for sin is the foundation of our Christian faith. It is the key that opens genuine repentance. Some people, when they feel sin and guilt end up in despair. But not us! We know Jesus longs to forgive us! His enemies nailed His loving hands to the cross, but that didn't stop Him from speaking. He proclaimed complete forgiveness – for the world and for us!

Turn to Jesus at the cross. He suffered and died there as one numbered among sinners. (Isaiah 53:12) Turn to the man who interceded between you and the Father: "*If anybody sins, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but for the sins of the whole world.*" (1 John 2:1-2)

Things in our world change. People will change. Clothes styles will change. But, Jesus' love for us will never change. His payment for the sins of the world will always cover the debt we owe to God! Sin has been atoned for by His shed blood! Let us turn by faith to Jesus. He always will receive us and forgive! Amen.