

## FORGIVENESS

Luke 23:33-43 Text vs. 34 *“Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”*

Today is November 20th, 2022. The last Sunday of the church year. Next Sunday we will begin a new church year. And how do we know that? Because we are a liturgical church. And what’s that? Liturgy is a public ceremony of worship performed especially by Christians. Liturgy has praise, thanksgiving, remembrance, prayer, and repentance for creating a relationship with God. Technically speaking, liturgy is done by those who want to be in God’s presence and be conscious of Him. Worship is one of the ways this can happen. God has promised that as we draw near to Him, He will draw near to us, and we will experience His presence in ever increasing measures. To do that, many churches follow a Lectionary. Many don’t!

The Lectionary goes back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century. It’s a book of Bible readings taken from Scripture and read on certain days of the year. It takes one full year to go through the entire Lectionary. Some modern lectionaries, such as the Revised Common Lectionary we use in this church, were developed from various Protestant lectionaries in use today. It’s a three-year cycle that follows the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and includes key dates, seasons, and colors that many protestant churches observe each year. For example, the liturgical color for this Sunday is white, to symbolize “Christ the King Sunday”. For the next four Sundays it will be purple in anticipation of the coming of God’s promise, Immanuel, meaning “God is with us” and will be the Season of Advent.

However, before we begin Advent next Sunday, this is Christ the King Sunday. And there’s an irony in that because our lesson shows us Jesus was put into the position of being a king! But to those people, Jesus was not a king. He was a rabble-rouser! The Roman soldiers took a sponge supposedly soaked in good wine, stick it on the end of a stick, and offered it up to Jesus to relieve His suffering. But it was distasteful. It was stomach-turning. It was vinegar wine. And Pilate, who was the Governor of the Roman province of Judaea under Emperor Tiberius, was the official who would preside over the trial of Jesus and in the end order the crucifixion of Jesus. But he had the audacity to have a sign nailed on the cross above Jesus’ head. And what was written on it? **INRI**. The Latin abbreviation for *‘Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews’*”

The ruling Pharisees and Sadducees complained about that! Jesus was not their king! But Pilate didn’t listen to them. Those Pharisees and Sadducees wanted Jesus killed for incitement to rebellion. He was a troublemaker. He was claiming to be the Christ. And what did that mean to speak of Jesus as the *“Christ”*? The word’s one of the most important words in a Christian’s vocabulary. The word *“Christ”* comes from a Greek word meaning *“anointed.”* So, to be the Christ, the Messiah had to be *“the anointed one of God.”* But what does *anointed* mean? To be anointed is to literally have sacred oil poured on one’s head. And when God chose a person for a special task, such as priest or king, they were anointed. And occasionally prophets were anointed. And rather than receiving a crown, Kings were anointed during their coronation. So, the overriding biblical meaning of the word *“Christ”* is, **chosen by God**. And that makes it obvious. The idea within the title “Christ” is that of a king.

And throughout the entire Old Testament God mentions He would send a great king to Israel. One who would someday rule the world. In Genesis, Jacob blessed each of his sons and said of Judah: *“The scepter will not depart from Judah. Nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs, and the obedience of the nations is his.”* (Genesis 49:10) They were expecting a great king who would arise out of Israel and be king over the whole earth. He had that authority from God. And Pilate thought the sign he had placed on the cross over the head of Jesus was fitting. It was a way to make clear why Jesus was being killed.

But Kings aren’t supposed to suffer. They’re supposed to cause suffering. Yet, this King suffered immensely. And instead of calling for revenge against His enemies, He asked God to forgive them. Not only did Jesus ask God to forgive His torturers, He asked forgiveness for them because they did not know what they were doing! How about that! No one would know what forgiveness truly is until Jesus revealed forgiveness from the cross.

The mother of a nine-year-old boy named Mark received a phone call in the middle of the afternoon. It was the teacher from her son’s school. “Mrs. Smith, something unusual happened today in your son’s third grade class. Your son did something that surprised me so much I thought you should know about it immediately.” That wasn’t particularly comforting to the mother as the teacher continued. “Nothing like this has ever happened in all my years of teaching. This morning, I was teaching a lesson on creative writing, and as always, I tell the story of the ant and the grasshopper. It’s about how the ant works hard all summer and stores up plenty of food while the grasshopper plays all summer long and does no work. Then, when winter comes, the grasshopper begins to starve because he has no food and begs, ‘Mr. Ant, you have so much food. Please let me eat, too.’ Then I tell the boys and girls, ‘Now, your job is to write the end of that story.’ Well, your son Mark raised his hand, and asked, ‘Teacher, may I draw a picture on the end of my answer?’ ‘Yes Mark, if you’d like. You may draw a picture. But first, you must write the ending to that story.’ Well, in all the years I’ve been doing this,

most of the students said, the ant shared his food through the winter, so both the ant and the grasshopper lived. A few children wrote, 'No, Mr. Grasshopper. You should have worked all the summer. Now, I have just enough food for myself. So, the ant lived. And the grasshopper died.' But your son told the end of the story in a way no other child had. He wrote, 'The ant gave all his food to the grasshopper. The grasshopper lived. But the ant died.' Then, your son Mark drew a picture at the bottom of the page. . . . It was three crosses!"

Yes, Mark knew forgiveness. He knew what Jesus gave was not just a nice gesture. He knew the only way for Jesus to pour out forgiveness was from the cross in the full measure God wants. Now, that's forgiveness! Have you tried it? Is there someone in your life who needs your forgiveness? And you haven't given it? If there is, how long are you going to keep your forgiveness to yourself? If you're doing that, you're soon going to discover just how badly you need God's forgiveness. And that you really don't know what forgiveness is. Or even how to forgive. But if you surrender completely to the God of forgiveness, and admit you need forgiveness, then you will discover that you've already been forgiven and now, it's time for you to forgive someone else.

Yes, the forgiveness God granted through Christ on the cross is the forgiveness for your sins! And the main thing about all of this is, you must learn how to forgive and forget. It all boils down to this. Make a conscious decision to stop blaming those who hurt you. Or, who you hurt. Refuse to let your memory of wrongdoings affect your life. But if it's *you* that's hurting *you*, then you need to learn how to forgive yourself, and let go of all that *stuff*. And when you do, it's going to help release you from a lot of negative emotions. That's what God has done for you. He has forgiven you. He has forgotten all your sins. Because, when you asked Him, the Bible says, "*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*" (1 John 1:9, ESV)

Listen, forgiveness and salvation are at the foot of the cross. The cross isn't just a symbol of God's sacrifice of Jesus. It's a symbol of God's salvation for you. It was on that cross your pathway to salvation was cleared. It was on that cross your sins were cleansed. It was on that cross your victory was won. And it was on that cross He forgave all your sins. He took them away and nailed them to the cross. That, my friend, is forgiveness!

And if Christ on the cross can forgive, so can you. AMEN