

Forgive Us Our Trespasses

Matthew 18:23-35; Luke 23:32-34

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

March 24, 2010 – Wednesday of Lent V



In the name of the Father, and of † the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. As we've been reading through the various Passion accounts of our Lord Jesus, one thought must have entered your mind – namely, how remarkable it is that Jesus is totally innocent of any wrong doing at all, and yet He still suffers, is betrayed, arrested, denied and abandoned by His friends and companions who avoid Him like the plague. And all this takes place at the same His enemies are vigorously and ruthlessly mocking Him, beating Him, hating Him without cause and finally crucifying Him. Even Pilate, who know He's done no wrong, does the unthinkable. He hands Him over to his enemies, who he knows will take His life. Spikes are hammered through His flesh. He's hoisted up and hung upon a cross – suspended between heaven and earth. Imagine, if you can, the agony, the anguish, and the searing pain as God's Son is utterly crushed.

And what does He do? Does He say: "Just wait 'till after the resurrection, you rotten so-and-sos! I'll get even with you then! You'll all get yours! I'll see to it Myself. I'll unleash Michael with all his mighty angels, and your cities will be dripping with blood after I'm through with you!" No, He doesn't do that all. Indeed, He does the opposite of what you might have expected. He prays: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!" Some have called His words reckless, careless, and ripe for abuse. After all, you can't just absolve everybody! What about those who won't believe or trust? You can't run a religion on mercy, or everyone's going to take advantage of you!

But as you may have noticed, Jesus doesn't pay any attention to our concerns – no matter how pious sounding. With profound pity, Jesus prays for His enemies and those who want to put Him to death. He prays for those who hate Him – those who don't believe in Him. Yes, He prays also for you. He prays for you because you also think you know what you're doing. But you don't. You were one of those who abandoned Him. You wouldn't be caught dead with an arrested, humiliated Jesus. You were in the crowd crying: "Crucify Him!" You mocked Him, jeered at Him, pounded the nails, hoisted Him up on the cross and shook your head in disgust. Your sin put Him there. And still Jesus prays for you: "Father, don't hold their sin against them. I will answer for it. Look, Father! My blood! I am the Passover Lamb! The Sacrifice! Don't damn them. Condemn Me! Give Me what they deserve. Forgive them for My sake!"

Your sin – my sin – Pilate's sin – the soldier's sin – the crowd's sin – the criminal's sin – the chief priest's sin – the world's sin – all sin – Jesus bears it in His body. It weighs Him down and crushes Him. No sin is left out, and no sinner is excluded. All that sin is what crushes the life out of Him as He earns full and complete forgiveness for us all – as He cancels all our debt, and all debtors are set free. Remember how Peter wanted to be so very careful with his forgiveness? He was ready to forgive seven times, but that's about all. But Jesus taught him, and all of us, that His forgiveness has no limits. His forgiveness knows no bounds. It's like a flood – going everywhere and touching everyone – spilling out all over the place – getting eve-

rybody wet – just like your Baptism. No sinner is outside of God’s mercy – not even yours or you. “Father, forgive them. Don’t give them what they deserve. Release them from Your wrath and from Your eternal, unbearable judgment.”

And Christ’s prayer is answered. His mercy bears fruit. One of the criminals heard His prayer for forgiveness. Though this criminal was once a mocker, now he’s a believer. “Jesus,” he asks Him, “remember me when you come into Your kingdom.” The Roman centurion in charge of Jesus’ crucifixion also heard Him, and afterward confessed: “Truly *this* Man *was* the Son of God.” Jesus prays: “Father, forgive them.” And you hear the answer to that prayer every time you confess your sin knowing that you deserve nothing but God’s punishment. And yet your pastor still proclaims to you in the name of Jesus that your sins are forgiven – and they are – because Jesus prayed for you – and then died for you.

And that’s why you can now pray with all boldness and confidence to our heavenly Father: “Forgive us our trespasses.” You know Divine forgiveness matters – that it’s forgiveness for Christ’s sake that shapes your life in the here and now. That’s why, as the Small Catechism teaches: “we too will sincerely forgive and gladly do good to those who sin against us.” In Christ, you see, there is to be no revenge, grudges or paybacks among those who have been forgiven. Therefore you can be as reckless with your forgiveness as Christ is with His. You can let it flow to others much like the water and blood

that gushed from our Savior’s crucified side. You don’t have to hoard it, damn it up, or be stingy with it. In fact, if you refuse to forgive others, that says something about what you believe about Christ and His death for you and for all. Since Christ died for everybody, who are you to say: “No, there’ll be no forgiveness for you Aunt Martha!” – or “I can never forgive you for that, brother Earl!” After all, God has already forgiven them in Christ, and means that if you now refuse to forgive, it isn’t going to go well with you.

As you forgive others, dear Christian, you are visibly demonstrating God’s love in Christ for all. Imagine! Your forgiveness spoken to others, is the very comfort of God – Divine assurance that their sin has been forgiven for Christ’s sake. When a wife says to her husband: “I forgive you” – or a husband speaks those words to his wife – or a child speaks those words to his or her parents – whenever any Christian forgives another person – that forgiveness is God’s forgiveness. The words: “I forgive you,” flood our lives with Christ’s forgiveness. In those words Christ is truly reigning in and among sinners. And you are strengthened individually in the knowledge that God has forgiven you. No wonder Jesus taught us to pray: “Forgive us our trespasses!” Because that forgiveness is the key to heaven and the confidence of all whose hope is stayed in Christ. Believe it and live – in the Name of Jesus. Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.