

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

What are the hardest words to say? We might think of “supercalifragilisticexpialidocious” or “Peter Piper picked a peck of pickles.” I think I know some tougher ones. How about “I’m sorry” or “thank you”? Some times, “I love you” can be tough. This might be one of the hardest - “I forgive you.” And those words are especially tough when we’re hurting or being hurt. Tonight we’ll hear the last of those tough words from Jesus. They’re Jesus first words from the cross - “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

Father, forgive them. Father, forgive him; forgive her.” How easy is it for you to say those words? And not just say them, but live them? Somebody tries to push us, bully us at school - what do we think? “Father, forgive” or “what a jerk”? Somebody steps on your toes, they stab you in the back at work - what do you think: “Father, forgive” or “she’ll get what she has coming”? We get cut off in traffic - forgive? The in-laws bite - forgive or bite back? The ex stinks things up, again - forgive or burn inside?

Jesus said; “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.” How could he be so forgiving?

Think about what the “they” were doing. The Roman soldiers had pounded spikes through his hands and feet, nailed him to a cross. Now they were casting lots, picking straws, throwing dice for his clothes - right under the cross, like Jesus didn’t matter. What would we ask the Father to give those soldiers? Forgiveness?

And what about the crowds? The crowds that stood watching. Who stepped up to help Jesus? Who spoke up for Jesus? When people see us hurt ... when people see us in trouble ... and do nothing, are we so forgiving?

And what about the leaders, the rulers, the priests and the church people? What were they doing? Mocking - “he saved others; let him save himself ... if he is the Christ of God.” What would we say back? “Father, forgive them”?

Jesus taught: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” “Love your enemy.” “Forgive seven times seventy.” And Jesus didn’t just teach it; he lived it. Nailed to the cross, the first words out of our Savior’s mouth are; “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” Jesus practiced what he preached. Perfectly, selflessly. Like God expects of me. Like God demands of me.

And what about me? That’s why Jesus was on that cross. Because all too often I don’t; and worse, there’s times I hardly even try. We might like to think that’s just human. It’s not just human; it’s damning; because God didn’t create us to be “just” human. He created us to reflect his love and share his love. And when I don’t, when I hold grudges and refuse to forgive and think it’s my job to make people pay for what they do to me, then I put myself in God’s courtroom where the soul that sins, it shall die.

That’s why Jesus was on that cross. He was facing the verdict, the judgment, the death sentence for my sin and yours. There on the cross he didn’t just say it; “Father, forgive them”; there on the cross he earned it. With his blood and his suffering, with his death he took our place under God’s judgment. There he set us free from God’s judgment for God’s forgiveness. And there he said: “Father, forgive them.” Even for nailing him to the cross - “Father, forgive them.” Even for the way the soldiers and the people went on like it didn’t matter - “Father, forgive them.”

And even for us - for me and for you - “Father, forgive them.” For the times our hurt turns us bitey - “Father, forgive them.” For the times we echo the devil and fight and bite at those who hurt us - “Father, forgive them.” Even for the way we turn our homes and our church - think of it - our homes and our church here are supposed are supposed to be safe places, places of peace - even for the way we might fill them with anger and hurt - “Father, forgive them.”

Jesus said it at the cross and he’s still saying it today. Why? So that we can live in God’s love forgiven and free. What does that mean for us today? Peace with God and peace with each other. And if not peace with each other, at least, peace for each other.

This season of Lent is a blessed time of year - we are reminded just how much our God loves us, just how much he was willing to give up for us - the Father gave up his Son to bring us into his family; Jesus gave up his pride, his hurt, his rights, his life for our forgiveness. And at the end of Lent, on Easter we get to celebrate Jesus' victory over death and the devil and all the evil and hurt they bring. We don't have to wait for Easter to celebrate that victory. Celebrate Christ's victory over sin; celebrate Christ's forgiveness of sin by making his words to be your words. When someone bites you, make Jesus' words your words - "Father, forgive them." When people who are supposed to love you and people who are supposed make life better for you don't - "Father, forgive them." Even before they're sorry; even when they aren't sorry - "Father, forgive them." Even when the words seem impossible - take Jesus' heart for your own - "Father, forgive them."

"Father, forgive them." Those words aren't always easy words, are they? They weren't easy words coming from the cross. But with the heart of Jesus they are some of the best words ever spoken. Amen.

Ash Wednesday

March 5, 2025

IN OUR WORSHIP TODAY ... We observe Ash Wednesday. Ash Wednesday worship does not look, sound, or feel like any other service. It is a service that includes unusual, and perhaps, uncomfortable elements: the pastor's black robe, the somber and serious tunes, the look and feel of dirty ash on a rough banner, the moments of silence for reflection, and a message that echoes God's curse placed not only on Adam and Eve, but on us as well: "For dust you are and to dust you will return." With this on our hearts, we are called to heed King David's plea: "Put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption." God bless your worship this evening.

Jesus' Words from the Cross



Forgiveness
Promise
Tender Care
Absolute Anguish
Need
Accomplishment

OPENING HYMN

"Jesus, I Will Ponder Now"

Hymn 420 (St. 1-3)

Jesus, I will ponder now on your holy passion;
with your Spirit me endow for such meditation.
Grant that I in love and faith may the image cherish
of your suff'ring, pain, and death that I may not perish.

Make me see your great distress, anguish, and affliction,
bonds and stripes and wretchedness and your crucifixion;
make me see how scourge and rod, spear and nails did wound you,
how for them you died, O God, who with thorns had crowned you.

Yet, O Lord, not thus alone make me see your passion,
but its cause to me make known and its termination.
Ah! I also and my sin wrought your deep affliction;
this indeed the cause has been of your crucifixion.

INSTRUCTION FOR THE BEGINNING OF LENT

P: Brothers and sisters in Christ, God created us to know joy in communion with him, to love all humanity, and to live in harmony with all creation. But sin separates us from God, our neighbors, and creation, and so we do not enjoy the life our Creator intended for us. By our sin we grieve our Father, who does not desire us to come under his judgment, but to turn to him and live. Therefore, God in his mercy has sent our Lord Jesus Christ to take our place under the law, to suffer for us, and to die the death we deserve. God made Jesus, who had no sin, to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

During the forty days of Lent we fix our eyes on Jesus, as the Author and Perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of God. The time of Lent reminds us that to know Christ and the power of his resurrection, we must also know the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death. As disciples of the Lord Jesus we are called to struggle against everything that leads us away from love of God and neighbor.

I invite you, therefore, to confess your sins, ask our Father for forgiveness, and commit yourselves to this struggle. Isaiah leads us to see and confess our wrong against the Lord. He shows us we can confess and repent with confidence and hope: the Lord has worked salvation. He has come and will come again as Redeemer for his people.

For our offenses are many in your sight,
and our sins testify against us.
Our offenses are ever with us,
and we acknowledge our iniquities:

rebellion and treachery against the LORD,
turning our backs on our God,
fomenting oppression and revolt,
uttering lies our hearts have conceived.

So justice is driven back,
and righteousness stands at a distance;
truth has stumbled in the streets,
honesty cannot enter.

Truth is nowhere to be found,
and whoever shuns evil becomes a prey.
The LORD looked and was displeased that there was no justice.

He saw that there was no one,
he was appalled that there was no one to intervene;
so his own arm worked salvation for him,
and his own righteousness sustained him.

He put on righteousness as his breastplate,
and the helmet of salvation on his head;
he put on the garments of vengeance
and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak.

According to what they have done,
so will he repay wrath to his enemies
and retribution to his foes;
he will repay the islands their due.

From the west, men will fear the name of the LORD,
and from the rising of the sun, they will revere his glory.
For he will come like a pent-up flood
that the breath of the LORD drives along.

“The Redeemer will come to Zion,
to those in Jacob who repent of their sins,” declares the LORD.

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.

"But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

P: Let us be silent. Let us be still. Let us pause now for a time of reflection and self-examination.

Silence for reflection and self-examination

CONFESSION OF SINS

P: Most holy and merciful Father,

C: we confess to you and to one another that we have sinned by our own fault, by our own grievous fault, in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone.

P: We have not loved you with our whole heart and mind and strength.

We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.

We have not forgiven others as we have been forgiven.

C: Have mercy on us, Lord.

P: We have been deaf to your call to serve as Christ served us.

We have not been true to the mind of Christ.

We have grieved the Holy Spirit.

C: Have mercy on us, Lord.

P: We confess to you, Lord, all our past unfaithfulness.

The pride, hypocrisy, and impatience in our lives

C: we confess to you, O Lord.

P: Our self-indulgent appetites and ways, our manipulation of other people

C: we confess to you, O Lord.

P: Our anger when our selfish aims are denied,

and our envy of those more fortunate than ourselves
C: we confess to you, O Lord.

P: Our love of worldly goods and comforts,
and our dishonesty in daily life and work

C: we confess to you, O Lord.

P: Our negligence in worship and prayer,
and our failure to show the faith that is in us

C: we confess to you, O Lord.

P: Forgive us, Lord, for the wrongs we have done. For our blindness to human
need and suffering, and our indifference to injustice and cruelty,

C: forgive us, O Lord.

P: For all false judgments, for uncharitable thoughts toward others, and for our
prejudice and contempt for those who differ from us,

C: forgive us, O Lord.

P: For what we think or say or do that is at variance with your will,

C: forgive us, O Lord.

P: Restore us, good Lord, and let your anger depart

C: Hear us, Lord, for your mercy is great.

CHOIR HYMN

"Father, Forgive Us"

*Father, forgive us for all we have done. Daily we stumble; from you we do run.
Often to try our own heaven to earn Forgive us, Lord; to your Son help us turn.*

*There on the cross we see God's only Son.
Payment for sin; once for all and for one.
"Father, forgive them," he prays on the tree.
Showing his love and his mercy so free*

*Look to the cross; find forgiveness and love,
Pardon from God in his heaven above.
Father, forgive us for all we have done. Father, forgive for the sake of your Son.
Father, forgive for the sake of your Son.*

THE CONFESSION OF THE ASH BANNER (see page 12)

*As we make our confession on the Ash Banner,
consider the cross with hymns found in
the Lent and Passion sections of our new hymnal - Christian Worship, 393-437.*

ORGAN MEDITATION *God so Loved the World (from "The Crucifixion") – John Stainer*
Arrangement by Sam Ellson

ABSOLUTION

P: Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, does not desire the death of sinners, but rather that they turn from their wickedness and live.

In love he has been merciful to us and has given his only Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Therefore, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

During these days of Lent, let us implore God to give us renewal and his Holy Spirit. May we continue to abide in the true faith, and at the last, be received by him through the merits of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C: **Amen.**

P: Accomplish in us, O God, the work of your salvation

C: **that we may show forth your glory in the world.**

P: By the cross and suffering of your Son, O Lord,

C: **bring us with all your saints to the joy of his resurrection.**

HYMN

"Jesus, I Will Ponder Now"

Hymn 420 (St. 4-6)

Grant that I your passion view with repentant grieving;
let me not bring shame to you by unholy living.
How could I refuse to shun ev'ry sinful pleasure
since for me God's only Son suffered without measure?

If my sins give me alarm and my conscience grieve me,
let your cross my fear disarm, peace of conscience give me.
Help me see forgiveness won by your holy passion.
If for me he slays his Son, God must have compassion!

Graciously my faith renew; help me bear my crosses,
learning humbleness from you, peace mid pain and losses.
May I give you love for love! Hear me, O my Savior,
that I may in heav'n above sing your praise forever.

SERMON

"He Spoke a Word of Forgiveness"

Luke 23:34

Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

OFFERING

If you prefer to give online, the code at the right will take you to our Online Giving page. We invite our online givers to join in our offering with an "I Give Online" card in the pew racks.

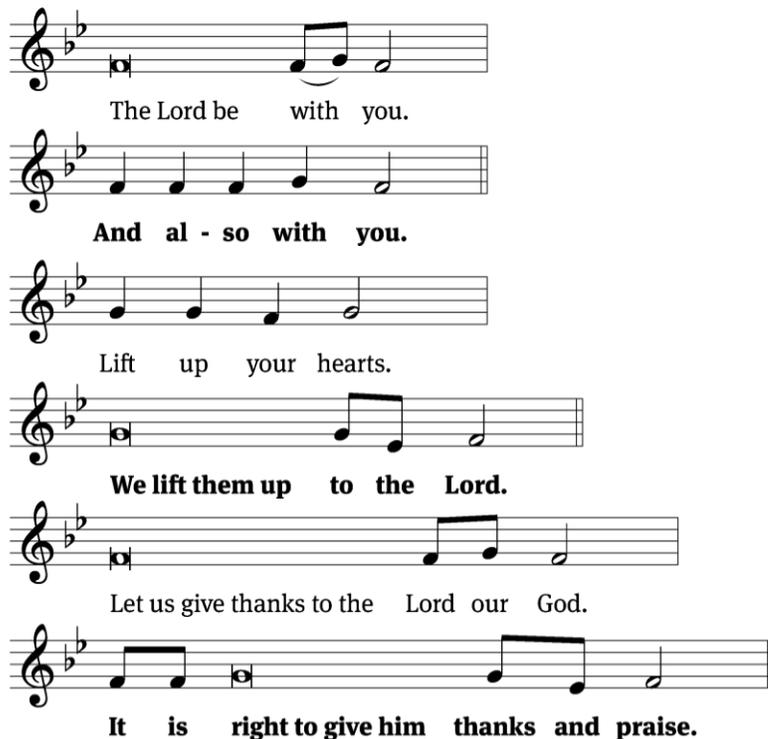


PRAYER AND LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

THE SACRAMENT

(Guests, please see our communion practice on p. 2)
(Gluten free wafers are available; please see Pastor.)



The Lord be with you.

And al - so with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give him thanks and praise.

M: It is truly good and right that we should at all times and in all places give you thanks, O Lord, holy Father, almighty and everlasting God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who brought the gift of salvation to all people by his death on the tree of the cross so that the devil, who overcame us by a tree, would in turn by a tree be overcome. Therefore, with all the saints on earth and hosts of heaven, we praise your holy name and join their glorious song:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY

Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord, God of pow - er,
God of might. Heav - en and earth are full of your
glo - ry. Ho - san - na in the high - est.
Bless - ed is he who comes in the name of the
Lord. Ho - san - na in the high - est, ho -
san - na in the high - est!

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

M: Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night he was betrayed, took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my † body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Then he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; this is my † blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

M: The peace of the Lord be with you always.

C: **Amen.**

JESUS, LAMB OF GOD

Je - sus, Lamb of God, you take a - way the
sin of the world; have mer - cy on us.
Je - sus, Lamb of God, you take a - way the
sin of the world; have mer - cy on us.
Je - sus, Lamb of God, you take a - way the
sin of the world; grant us your peace.

DISTRIBUTION HYMN

"Jesus, Grant that Balm and Healing"

Hymn 404

Jesus, grant that balm and healing in your holy wounds I find,
ev'ry hour that I am feeling pains of body and of mind.
Should some evil thought within tempt my treach'rous heart to sin,
show the peril, and from sinning keep me ere its first beginning.

Should some lust or sharp temptation fascinate my sinful mind,
let me think about your passion, and new courage I shall find.
Or should Satan press me hard, let me then be on my guard,
saying, "Christ for me was wounded," that the tempter flee confounded.

If the world my heart entices with the broad and easy road,
with seductive, sinful vices, let me weigh the awful load
you were willing to endure. Help me flee all thoughts impure,
mastering each wild temptation, calm in prayer and meditation.

Ev'ry wound that pains or grieves me by your wounds, Lord, is made whole;
when I'm weak, your cross revives me, granting new life to my soul.
Yes, your comfort renders sweet ev'ry bitter cup I meet;
for your all-atoning passion has procured my soul's salvation.

O my God, my rock and tower, grant that in your death I trust,
knowing death has lost its power since you crushed it in the dust.
Savior, let your agony ever help and comfort me;
when I die be my protection, light and life and resurrection.

CLOSING PRAYER

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his mercy endures forever.

Whenever we eat this bread and drink this cup,
we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

We give you thanks, O Lord, for the foretaste of the heavenly banquet you have given us in this Sacrament. Through this gift you have fed our faith, nourished our hope, and strengthened our love. By your Spirit, help us to live as your holy people until that day when you will receive us as your guests at the wedding supper of the Lamb, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

BLESSING

M: The Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.
The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace. **Amen.**

CLOSING HYMN

"Abide with Me"
Hymn 783

Abide with me, fast falls the eventide.
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide.
When other helpers fail and comforts flee, help of the helpless, O abide with me.

Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
change and decay in all around I see; O thou who changest not, abide with me.

Come not in terrors, as the King of kings,
but kind and good, with healing in thy wings,
tears for all woes, a heart for ev'ry plea;
come, Friend of sinners, thus abide with me.

Thou on my head in early youth didst smile,
and though rebellious and perverse meanwhile,
thou hast not left me oft as I left thee; on to the close, O Lord, abide with me.

I need thy presence ev'ry passing hour;
what but thy grace can foil the tempter's pow'r?
Who like thyself my guide and stay can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, O abide with me!

I fear no foe with thee at hand to bless;
ills have no weight and tears no bitterness.
Where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy victory?
I triumph still if thou abide with me.

Hold thou thy cross before my closing eyes;
shine through the gloom and point me to the skies.
Heav'n's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;
in life, in death, O Lord, abide with me!

Lent Customs and Opportunities

The Color Purple - the color of royalty reminds us of Christ as our King, willing to be crowned with thorns, willing to sacrifice himself for his people, fighting our battle against Satan and evil, winning our victory for life. When we see what our king was willing to go through for us, the color purple also becomes the color of repentance - our commitment to live with Christ as King.

Lenten Self-Denial Offering - some Christians find that giving up (sacrificing) some normal part of life (meat, candy, TV, for example) helps them consider Jesus' sacrifice for them. Some Christians find that a special gift (perhaps the savings from what they gave up) for Christ's church is a meaningful way to thank Jesus. Special gifts can be given for the special work of the church (any Lent offering envelope) or designated for a special project with the special offering envelope.

Ashes on Ash Wednesday

For thousands of years, God's people have used ashes as a sign of sorrow over sin. For hundreds of years, Christ's Church has used ashes at the beginning of the season of Lent, now known as Ash Wednesday, to express our sorrow over sin.

We won't be placing ashes on your foreheads, but we will use ashes as a way to make the "confession we say" into a "confession we see" by marking our confession with ash. In our Ash Wednesday service we will have the opportunity to step forward, dip our finger into a bowl of ash, and place our mark in the form of a cross on a burlap banner. We will then wipe our fingers clean and return to our seats.

Why make a mark with ash? The symbolism is rich:

- we make our individual mark acknowledging our individual guilt
- we make our marks together confessing our common sinfulness
- we feel the rough texture of burlap - our sorrow and Christ's cross are rough and pained
- we mark the sign of the cross - the cost of our sin - declaring our confidence in Christ as our Savior.

Not everyone will feel comfortable joining in this symbolism, so don't feel pushed. Feel free to participate as you are comfortable. Or feel free not to participate. Either way, feel free in the forgiveness of Christ!

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent, the Christian's 40-day journey with the Lord to the cross and tomb, preparing for the proclamation of Easter. The 40 days are reminiscent of several biblical events: Jesus' 40-day fast at the beginning of his ministry, Moses' stay on Mount Sinai at the giving of the Law, Elijah's fast on his way to the mountain of God.

Ash Wednesday begins the Christian's Lenten journey with a reminder of our mortality and a call to repentance (Genesis 18:27; Job 46:6; Jeremiah 6:26; Matthew 11:21). The ancient practice of imposing ashes on the foreheads of the faithful gives Ash Wednesday its name. The church father Tertullian (A.D. 160-215) writes of the practice as a public expression of repentance and of our human frailty that stands in need of Christ. The ashes remind us forcefully of our need for redeeming grace as they recall words from the rite for Christian burial: "...earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust..." words, that will someday be spoken over us all. The imposition of ashes has never been an exclusively Roman Catholic practice and today is observed by Christians of many traditions.

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