

Lord Forgive Them

Luke 23:33-43

Christ the King

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Bonnie A. Perry

The Church at Crossroads, Detroit

November 23, 2025

May the God who creates us, redeems us, and sustains us, be with us this day, and remain with us always. Amen.

The last words of Jesus as he dies on the cross in St. Luke's account of the crucifixion are telling. They are very different from the other three versions relayed in Matthew, Mark and John. In Matthew and Mark, Jesus screams out amidst excruciating pain, "*My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?!*" In John's Gospel, Jesus somehow seems to be beyond pain, and instead as those around him jeer, asks his friend John to care for his mother Mary and then he says to God above, "*It is finished.*" And he takes his last breath.

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus is seemingly neither beyond the pain, nor controlled by it. Rather he seems attuned to other people. He is seemingly connected to the ones around him. He scans, the crowd, no doubt with eyes almost blinded by pain, he scans the crowd and prays to Abba God, prays to God, "*Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.*" In his insane pain his attention is pointed beyond himself, to those whose presence as they stand by watching sin happen, as they look on, leer and jeer, he worries for their souls. He pities their misdirected attentions and inability to see the pain, fear, suffering and sin that is happening all around them.

Holy One, God almighty, please forgive them for their blindness and stupidity. Forgive them for their willingness to be third party participants in sin as they see it happen before them and take no action and do no thing, to name it or stop it. The people who jeer or stand by silently, sin in their passivity and their tacit acquiescence to power.

Jesus says, "*Father forgive them.*" But we know they can do better.

Perhaps, we know in our own lives, that we too can do better. That we, when we see sin, when we see sin, and refuse to acknowledge it, refrain from containing it, we know for ourselves as we know for these people of whom we read, we know that all of us who long to follow Jesus can do better.

And Jesus, being Jesus, offers hope, encouragement and forgiveness. Not condemnation, scorn or dismissal.

I don't know about you, but I always do better, when I know someone believes I can be more, do more, be better, do better.

Jesus believes in them, Jesus believes in us, even when we fall so very far from all that is good and just.

You'll remember in Luke's depiction of the crucifixion, the two robbers who are executed with him, are in dialogue with him. One says, and I very much identify with him, one asks,

*"So are you the Messiah? If you are, save yourself; save us."* But the other thief replies, *"Do you not fear God? You too have been condemned to die and we are actually getting what we deserve."*

And then the second thief stops talking to his literal partner in crime and turns to Jesus. He asks simply and with a profound amount of faith, *"Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom."* And Jesus says, *"Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."* Then Jesus, said, *"Father, into your hands I give my spirit."*

Before Jesus offers his spirit to God, before he dies, while in excruciating pain, his attention is directed to all those people who are around him. Be they good or bad, holy or flawed, Jesus offers care, he predicts salvation, to the one who asks him, to the one who knows he has fallen short, and in that moment wants to do and be better.

Friends, it is a decidedly hard time in our world. Elected members of Congress, one of whom is one of our Senators, have created a video, encouraging members in our armed forces to obey only legal orders. To keep their oath to our constitution and obey only lawful orders. Our president has responded to this video by accusing these congressional members of "seditious behavior punishable by death" and then reposting a social media screed that calls for these elected members of congress to be hanged.

We are past the bonds of political polarities and have entered a world of despotic authoritarian overreach, which given the preponderance of guns in our country has every possibility of inciting violence against these elected representatives.

We can no longer stand by watching. Jesus will forgive us for our inept passivity. But we know, as he knew that we can do so much better, so much more.

Those who stood by and watched Jesus be executed by the state were as culpable as the Romans who signed the laws and the soldiers who pounded the nails.

We know more, than they knew then. We follow Jesus Christ, the son of God, who showed us what courage, care, sacrifice and love look like.

Now is our call, to give thanks for our God and to say "No" to the evil that is all around us.

We can do better, than those whom Jesus forgave on that day. In every small way and using all we have, it is now that we in Michigan say "No," to the evil that calls for death, to those who speak truth to power.

Now is the time that we say "No."

In Christ's name.