

**Last Sunday after Pentecost Luke 23:35-43**

The prayer fell gently from his lips, as he gasped for air, as his life slowly ebbed from his body, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” The words were barely audible above the roar of the crowd. Jewish leaders stood by laughing and mocking the condemned man striped naked, nailed to a cross.

One man piped up, “He saved others, let see if he can save himself.” Laughter erupted as the Jewish leadership roared their mocking approval. Anger had infiltrated these men, hatred oozed deep from their very beings for this man the condemned, Jesus, the one who claimed to be their Savior.

The soldiers not wanting the Jewish leadership to have all the fun joined the mocking “If you are the king of the Jews save yourself.” Then a short time later a thief, a common criminal hoping for a reprieve from his execution, cries out to Jesus, “Are you not the Christ? Save us and save yourself!”

Hatred and anger, disgust and greed, boiled over that day as a thirst for blood permeated many who watched the crucifixion.

The son of God, the Messiah, the Christ would die there alone on a hill, stripped naked, beaten, battered, bruised and bloodied, a crown of thorns piercing his brow, and amazingly the prayer that fell gently from his lips as he awaited death to come and collect his soul was not a prayer of self-interest, not a prayer for self preservation but a prayer for those who had put him up on that cross, for those who hated him, for those who had orchestrated his execution-- “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

That moment in time, there on the hill, from the cross, time seemed to stand still for this was the moment when God could have said this it it, they’ve crucified me, I’m done with these people. Look what they’ve done now.

But this was to be perhaps the moment of God’s greatest triumph, the moment when we really get to see what this God, this God who so loved the world that he gave his only son... was all about.

And what we find is astonishing for God who did not get down off the cross, he didn't put up a fight in the face of His death, he didn't seek revenge, he wouldn't call down angels from heaven, instead Jesus allowed those who hated him to do what they would do with him and there from the cross he offered a prayer for their forgiveness "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

There from the cross Jesus reached out his arms of love in forgiveness and offered a prayer for those who with anger and disgust could not believe that maybe God was doing a new thing in Jesus.

He offered it for those so filled with hatred they couldn't possibly receive the gift of His forgiveness. "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

He offered his prayer of forgiveness for those passing by who got caught up in the spectacle of the cross those unwilling to commit themselves to him and his mission. "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

He offered his prayer of forgiveness for the apathetic and the disinterested. For the thief who cared only about his own hide. “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”

He offered it for those who turn away from him who find their Gods in other places—He said, “Father, forgives them for they know not what they do.”

Forgiveness fell from the cross that day, a prayer spoken quietly from the lips of a dying Christ, and overheard by one person, a condemned criminal crucified alongside Christ. The prayer he heard offered assurance of God forgiveness, something that freed the condemned man from the fear that shackled him to this world and some how allowed him the courage to offer his own feeble prayer, his own confession, “Look, we have gotten what we deserve, Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

The criminal in his confession has thrown himself at the feet of Christ for somehow this condemned man has glimpsed Christ’s offer of forgiveness and found it as the only way for him to recover his tattered and broken life one that would end shortly there on the cross.

And then out of the silence Jesus summons the last bit of his energy to offer the condemned man words of hope, words of salvation, “Today you will be with me in paradise.”

These words offer the condemned man a lifeline suddenly the cross he was hanging from was bearable, the pain that wracked his body no longer tortured his soul, for Christ in those eight simple words- “Today you will be with me in paradise” offered the condemned man salvation. He was forgiven and he was saved

Salvation began at the moment, the moment that the condemned man turned from darkness to light, the moment that he received the forgiveness freely offered by God through Christ’ prayer “Father, forgive them...”

Salvation began as he turned from his old life to accept the new life freely offered in Christ. A new life that no one else that day could see or fathom because they were so caught up in the world, twisted in their hatred, stuck in their disgust.

Salvation begins not at some future point at the moment of our deaths but rather it begins here and now-- when we turn ourselves away from the world and toward the light that Christ offers us.

Salvation begins again each moment that we accept that we are forgiven and that we accept that Christ has paradise to offer us, something that this world can and will never be able to offer us.

May we this day bask in Christ prayer that offers us the forgiveness of the Father and may we rest in the assurance that today we have the opportunity to step out of this world and be with Christ in paradise.

Amen