

Midweek Lent 3

February 24, 2016

Sermon Text: Luke 23:32-34

On October 2, 2006, Charles Roberts IV parked his pick-up truck right in front of a one-room schoolhouse in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. With gun in hand, he entered the school and took ten young girls hostage. By the end of the tense 30-minute standoff, five young girls lay dead and another five lay critically injured.

You might remember that school shooting; schools now lock their doors during class hours because of it. You might even remember something almost more shocking than the shooting itself. The Amish community *forgave* the shooter. They consoled the shooter's devastated father. They comforted his grieving wife. They attended the shooter's funeral. A father of one of the victims even said: "[Roberts] had a mother and a wife and a soul and now he's standing before a just God." ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West\\_Nickel\\_Mines\\_School\\_shooting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Nickel_Mines_School_shooting))

What is your reaction to what the Amish did? On the one hand, you might admire the willingness to forgive. On the other hand, maybe you wonder if you could ever say those words. After all, have you ever held heated grudges over something far less tragic? How do you even begin feeling the need to forgive those who hurt you in the most painful, most calloused of ways?

Tonight, see Jesus address that question. **THE GREAT PAIN TO FORGIVE** *starts at the cross and flows through you.*

To be sure, Jesus suffered pain all the way to the cross. His very own disciple—someone he trusted, someone who heard his soul-strengthening teachings, someone with whom he bonded—betrays him. Armed guards grab Jesus and corral him to the Jewish courthouse for an after-hours trial.

Over the next twelve hours, he endures mind-numbing, humiliating torture. Fists smack his face, spit dribbles down his cheeks, a wooden club knocks his head. Someone twists thorns together and press them into his skull. His stomach growls for food, his dry mouth is parched. His disciples deny any association with him. Trusted Jewish leaders twist his kindest words into the most blatant of lies. His unmatched miracles prove that he is the Savior of the world, but people accuse him of helping Satan. The Roman governor, Pilate—the man with the power to set him free—caves into the pressure to crucify him. The people would rather live with the life-taking murderer named Barabbas, instead of the raising-dead-to-life Jesus!

**Luke 23:32-34**

<sup>32</sup>Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. <sup>33</sup>When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. <sup>34</sup>Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

Our reading uses the simplest of words to describe the darkest of actions. **Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left.** Jesus gets the death sentence! He never killed anyone! He did not plot a murderous riot. He never even cheated on his taxes! Still, he suffers a punishment reserved for the most hardened criminals! He hangs between two convicted criminals, as if to lump him into their same crime. Not to mention, people stand around the cross, taunting him to come down, pleading to change their unbelieving hearts with one final miracle.

Here hangs Jesus— unable to hug his sobbing mother one last time. Not able to lie in his deathbed, close his eyes, and fall asleep. Not able to strengthen his friends with one final “goodbye.”

Would you blame Jesus if he actually did come down from the cross, rip open the earth, and then damn every wicked scoundrel into hell’s fiery pits? It takes more time to sentence the other two criminals to death than it does for the leaders to sentence him! People lie in order to hurt him! He is innocent; he has been wronged! Why not make them suffer even more than he does?

It only makes sense, does it not? To make sure people know that you hold power over their happiness. So, if someone cuts you off on the road, make sure to speed up to their bumper, blare your horn, and give the one-finger salute [middle-finger]. After all, they made you angry, so make their day just as miserable! If your friend hurts your feelings, then say something to make their feelings hurt longer than yours! If the cashier’s slowness irritates you, make sure to tell them just how you feel. After all, they would get fired to talk back, right?

The devil wants you to feel justified in holding grudges. Why? So that you may no longer see **THE GREAT PAIN TO FORGIVE** you *starting at the cross*.

Children are taught that simple truth: “Jesus dies on the cross for my sins.” You probably know it yourself. Did you catch it? Jesus is not crucified because humanity got their way. Your Savior calls himself the Good Shepherd who lays his life down for the sheep ([John 10:14-18](#)). He lays down his life for you, meaning that he hands over his life to death on the cross.

He suffers great pain because he does not want you to suffer eternal pain. If we were perfect, he would have no reason to die. If we could bleach away our own scarlet stains of sin, he would have no need to walk up Calvary. Yet, we know how often our hearts hold stubborn grudges. So, Jesus, who holds no grudges, willingly suffers under his Father’s righteous grudge against your sin.

**THE GREAT PAIN TO FORGIVE** *starts at the cross* because only at the cross are your grudges forgiven. To “forgive” means to “release” or to “free from a contract.” On the cross, Jesus releases you from the guilt, from the consequences your sins deserve. So, when you meet your Maker, when you stand before the judgment throne of God, you carry no debt that God will demand you pay off. Instead, because of Jesus he will see that payment made in full, removed, forgiven!

So, the moment the cross thumps into the ground, Jesus' very first plea is: "**Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.**" Driven by unbelief, both Jews and Romans do all they can to remove Jesus from the face of the earth. Yet, their unbelief not only kills an innocent man, but also pushes their hearts to reject him as their Savior. Jesus knows that even these people, who do something so terrible against him, are walking down the road to hell. In his deep compassion for their eternal wellbeing, Jesus desires that they be forever spared such suffering and stand in the halls of heaven! He wants them to trust in him as Savior from sin!

If this is what your Savior desires— and you are connected to him through faith— and his desires are your desires— then how do you forgive? How do you react when your friend buried such painful words into your heart? How can you forgive when someone's carelessness unraveled the life you wanted for your family? How can you be compassionate to someone who stands oblivious to the sheer gut-wrenching pain they brought into your life?

You may feel justified to hold grudges. You may want others to suffer as much as they made you suffer. It just feels fair— and no one else in the world would blame you for seeking revenge. **THE GREAT PAIN TO FORGIVE** *starts at the cross and flows through you.* Why does Jesus forgive you? You and I were not such good people that God needed to gather us for heaven. You and I are not better candidates for forgiveness than others. Instead, mercy which blossomed inside of God compelled him to forgive us.

**THE GREAT PAIN TO FORGIVE** *flows through you.* Each Sunday you confess that you are by nature sinful and you deserve only eternal death in hell. Each Sunday you hear that God has forgiven you because he sent Jesus to secure your forgiveness. Each Sunday you are assured that God is not going to take revenge on you; he has removed your wrongs against him.

So, you pray in the Lord's Prayer: "Forgive us as we forgive others." You forgive, releasing offenders from personal grudges and from ill wishes. Forgiving does not mean that consequences do not follow. You may lose trust in someone proven untrustworthy. Friendships might end. Reputations might suffer. Yet, you forgive, meaning that you leave any punishment in God's hands. You forgive with the attitude of Jesus, leading that person to know what they are doing so that they might not fall under God's eternal judgment.

You might find yourself standing at another crossroads, one which brings piercing grief. People may hurt you in the deepest, most emotional of ways. You may mourn at how their actions will force your life to change. Instead of feeding an anger which destroys your heart, only at the cross do you find the strength to release others from their wrongs against you. There you see Jesus suffer great pain to release you from the debt you owed God. He suffers so that you might never suffer eternally.

Seeing his mercy and compassion for you motivates you to deal in Christian love with others. It might bring great personal pain. It might not feel fair. It might not be easy. Yet, God's loving forgiveness towards you compels you to forgive others. **THE GREAT PAIN TO FORGIVE** *starts at the cross and flows through you.*