

Luke 23:1-56
Passion Sunday - C
April 14, 2019
Infinite Mercy for All!

Grace ... mercy ... peace ... to you my brothers and sisters in Christ from God our Father and Jesus Christ, His Son, our Lord. Amen.

Earlier in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus teaches about how we're to treat our enemies saying, **(Luke 6:36)** *"Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful."* In our gospel today, Jesus is surrounded by enemies. During His crucifixion, He has ample opportunity to show first hand how to live by these words.

Crucifixion is a horrible way to die...it's one of the most torturous forms of death ever invented by man. Those who study such things believe it could take up to four or five days for someone to die from crucifixion. Think about that for a second ... four or five days ... a typical work week for many ... four or five days.

As Jesus hung dying on the Cross, a couple of hours into what normally was a very long and excruciating death, He continued to live His teaching, **(Luke 6:36)** *"Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful."* For those who were there that day, that was good news!

After being beaten and scourged and mocked and abused, Jesus was led through the mean streets of Jerusalem to Calvary. **(Luke 23:33-34)** *"And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on His right and one on His left. And Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'"* Though ignorance is no excuse for sin, Jesus asked His Father to forgive all who were involved. He asked His Father to forgive not only the soldiers who ignorantly nailed Him to the Cross, but also everyone who was present as they all had a role in His death. The Temple rulers...they falsely convicted Him and brought Him to Pilate. The people ... many yelled "We want Barabbas ... Crucify! Crucify!"

while some ignored what was going on, and even His faithful followers scattered when He was arrested. Nobody came to His aid in His time of need. Yet here is Jesus, His first words from the Cross, maybe an hour or so into His suffering, interceding for all mankind asking His Father to forgive them. He didn't ask for justice or divine retribution on those who tortured Him. He asked for mercy for them ... those He could've rightfully called His enemies.

Despite His words of mercy, the mocking and abuse continued. Through it all the mockers unknowingly confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God who came to save the world, including them, from sin and death. (Luke 23:35-39) *"...the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at Him, saying, 'He saved others; let Him save Himself, if He is the Christ of God, His Chosen One!' The soldiers also mocked Him, coming up and offering Him sour wine and saying, 'If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!' There was also an inscription over Him 'This is the King of the Jews.' One of the criminals who were hanged railed at Him, saying, 'Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!'"* Through it all, Jesus remained focused on His Father's will.

Then ... conceivably less than three hours into Jesus' suffering, an interesting thing happened. The second criminal crucified with Christ, perhaps saw how Jesus reacted to all the hate and revulsion being thrown at Him, hearing the "confessions," and also hearing Jesus words of mercy. As a result, this man became the first person in the entire scene to come to Jesus' defense. He became the first person to confess from his heart who Jesus was. He became the first person to ask for Jesus' mercy and forgiveness. He responded boldly from his cross to his co-criminal (Luke 23:40-42) *"(He) rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.' And he said, 'Jesus, remember me when*

you come into your kingdom.’” In response to the criminal’s truthful confession about who Jesus was and his repentant confession of his sins, Jesus had mercy on this sinner. Jesus not only forgave him his sins, but granted him eternal life saying **(Luke 23:43)** *“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”*

Jesus shows mercy as His final act. And His Father shows mercy on Jesus. After maybe six hours of agony, plus the night of torture beforehand, we read ... **(Luke 23:46)** *“Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!’ And having said this He breathed His last.”* Jesus showed perfect mercy to all who were there ...

And ... in a way, each of us was there on that horrible day. And while that may seem like bad news ... hear this word from Jesus, spoken to you and me also, as He hung dying on the cross, **(Luke 23:34)** *“Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.’”* Jesus asks His Father to forgive all sinners ... then and now. Paul tells us in Romans **(Romans 3:23)** *“... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God ...”* and **(Romans 6:23)** *“... the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* Then, Paul follows these words with **(Romans 10:9)** *“...(If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”* Just as Jesus has mercy on the second criminal on the basis of his confession and repentance, Jesus has mercy on us!

Knowing what God’s mercy feels like ... the load it takes off our minds ... we can love those around us by being merciful to them and easing the burdens they might be feeling. Nevertheless, sometimes we fail to show mercy. But God still shows His mercy to each of us ... His children.

As we open every worship service, we join together in confessing our sins ... and receiving God’s forgiveness. As we confess our sins, we also confess with our mouths our faith in God the

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and His promise of forgiveness. We believe these words! And so, we too are absolved for our part in our Lord's crucifixion. Jesus has mercy on us. He speaks to us as He spoke to the forgiven criminal, (Luke 23:43) *"Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."* NOW...we are forgiven. THEN...we will be with Him in His kingdom. This is the Gospel we can share to all we meet around the Cross of Christ. Amen.

James Kent