

Devotion for April 14, 2017 – Good Friday

Luke 23:34 (NIV84)

Theme: “The Light of Forgiveness”

<sup>34</sup> *Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”*

Some people call June 28, 1914 the worst day in history. Why? Because on that day Archduke Franz Ferdinand – the presumptive heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne was assassinated. The outrage caused by this event sparked World War I, which in turn led to the rise of Communism and Fascism, which in turn led to the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War.

Now think about this: if the assassination of an earthly heir to the throne can cause the misery and death of millions upon millions of people around the world, to what will the assassination of the only heir to God’s throne lead?

The forgiveness of sin?

Right after his crucifixion, Jesus prayed: *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”* What amazing grace! Just think of all the darkness Jesus suffered up until this point: the betrayal by a chosen disciple and the desertion of others, close friends who couldn’t stay awake to pray with him and false accusations from the very people he came to save. Even though he was declared innocent multiple times, he was beaten, scourged, mocked, ridiculed and, finally, crucified.

And this didn’t just happen in some dark alley; it was out in the open, during Jerusalem’s biggest religious festival to which many Jews from all over the Roman empire (and beyond) travelled. In other words, the Son of God was openly accused, beaten and killed in the sight of the world – and no one tried to stop it.

Again: if the assassination of Franz Ferdinand, to which the crowds did not assent, led to one of the greatest global conflicts in history – to what will the world’s public killing of the Son of God lead?

The forgiveness of sin?

Yes, the forgiveness of sin! You see, everything that took place was in fulfillment of the Scriptures that said it would be so. Jesus came to his own, and his own rejected him. Why? Because the human heart is that sinful. It wants nothing to do with God. It hates him. Want proof? Look at Jesus’ cross.

But Jesus was there for a reason. He loved His creation, even though it hated him. He came to save us. This is why, instead of speaking words of revenge, the very first words uttered from Jesus’ lips after the nails were driven into his hands and feet, and his naked body was suspended in the air were: *“Father, forgive them. . .”*

Do we hear Jesus' correctly? Is he asking God to forgive Roman soldiers who manhandled and crucified him? Is he asking his Father to forgive the priests of their conspiracy and of first degree murder? Is he asking God to forgive the disciples who had deserted him and, if he had been still alive, even the disciple who betrayed him?

Yes, and much more.

Jesus is asking God the Father to show mercy to every person that has ever and will ever exist - people who are born spiritually blind and have no knowledge of the true God. He is asking his Father to forgive all the dark and horrible atrocities committed throughout human history. He is even asking his heavenly Father to forgive you and me, whose sins moved Jesus to take up his cross to save us.

Why? Jesus gives the reason: "*for they do not know what they are doing.*"

But how can Jesus say this? Certainly, the members of the Sanhedrin knew what they were doing when they plotted Jesus' death. Certainly, the crowd knew what it was doing, when it chanted, "Crucify him." Certainly, Pilate knew what he was doing when, declaring Jesus innocent and washing his hands of him, he gave him over to be crucified. And certainly, we know what we are doing - every time we choose to sin over following God's good and gracious commands: the consequences of which led Christ to be crucified.

And yet, Jesus' words are true. The High-priest, the Sanhedrin, Pilate, the soldiers and the crowd didn't really *know* what they were doing. Blinded by the sin that dominated their hearts, they couldn't see Jesus for who he truly is: the Son of God. Truth be told, everyone lives in such darkness: ignorant of God and his will. Want proof? Turn on the news and learn about all the selfishness, crime, hatred, mistrust, revenge and other evils going on around us. Yes, ever since the fall into sin, humanity lives in spiritual darkness - not knowing what it is doing because it doesn't know God. Worse yet, because of our sin, we deserve to be in the place of everlasting darkness, torment and separation from God that we know by the name hell.

But God doesn't want us lost in hell. He loves us with an amazing, underserved love. This is why he asked his Son to suffer the just punishment our sins had earned. This is why Jesus willingly consented. And this is also why, in the midst of the darkness of all the brutality he suffered from the very people he came to save - Jesus asks for their forgiveness; thereby publicly proclaiming that *God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*<sup>i</sup>

And so, in the midst of all the spiritual darkness surrounding Christ's crucifixion, Jesus' words stand as a light: revealing the wonderful heart of our merciful God.

Do not run away, but come into that light by humbling yourself before the LORD! Repent of all your sins, for they will all be forgiven for Christ's sake. This is the very reason Jesus came into the world and allowed his crucifixion: to make atonement for your sins and reconcile you to God. Be reconciled to God, therefore, through faith in His Son. Then the same light of life that burned

in Christ's heart will also burn in yours. so that you may know the LORD and forevermore live at peace with him as his dearly loved child . Amen.

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<sup>1</sup>John 3:17 NIV84