

**Good Friday Reflections**  
**Old First Reformed United Church of Christ**  
**April 18, 2014**

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*Then Jesus said, "Father forgive them, for they do not know what they do".*

The first words of Jesus as He is dying are of forgiveness. In the agony of a painful death, Jesus is extending His forgiveness to the soldiers who have crucified Him, the Jewish priests and leaders who blackmailed the Roman government to put Him to death, and the disciples who had, all but one, scattered in fear of suffering the same fate as their Leader. As Jesus is suspended between earth and heaven, He is interceding for sinners on earth, making intercession for us with His Father in heaven. He is the Lamb, bearing our sins; He is our PRIEST, pleading our case and commanding His Father to forgive the sins of the world!

As I reimagine the Crucifixion, I ponder as to what those who heard Jesus pronounce these words might have thought.

The Roman soldiers who were casting lots for His cloak at His feet had no clue that God had placed them in a position to help orchestrate Christ's supreme sacrifice for the world's sins. They were the ones who God was using to fulfill scriptures: "They divide my garments among them and for my clothing they cast lots." (Psalm 22:18) Had they ever had a condemned, dying man forgive them as death approached?

Surely this single action must have caused many of them to wonder, as witnessed when the centurion later exclaimed, "Truly this was the Son of God." (Matthew 27:54)

What thoughts ran through the minds of the Jewish leaders who had plotted and successfully brought Him to the cross? Did any of them recall the prophecies at this critical moment: Psalm 22:16b: "They pierced my hands and feet" or Isaiah 53 that vividly details Christ's suffering and the purpose of it? "Because He poured out Himself to death, Yet He bore the sin of many and interceded for the transgressors"

As all the disciples, except John, scattered in fear, they must have realized that they had abandoned their beloved Teacher at the moment when He

most needed them. What guilt they must have felt that day and the subsequent days until the Resurrection.

How do these words apply to my life today? As I reflect on these words and on those present at the crucifixion, I see myself at various times of my life.

As a young working mother I heard the word, I knew that Christ was with me and yet I allowed circumstances and the hurried schedule of my life to rob me of a deeper walk with Jesus. Even so, Christ was with me and though I made choices I would later regret, God sustained me and provided me with hope.

Years later I realized that God had strengthened me during the pain of a broken marriage and the devastation it caused my children. Like some at the foot of the cross, I too did not know what I was doing, yet in the midst of this God forgave me.

Like the disciples, guilt and remorse became my companions. For years I saw "happy, young people", witnessed the wedding of a young couple, the guilt that my own children were not completely happy, emotionally whole, brought tears of pain and remorse.

Five years ago, God lead me to join a group of fellow sufferers (Al Anon) who share support for one another as they apply simple principles, such as living one day at a time and humbly practice the simple yet challenging act of turning things over to God. Through this group I reconnected with Jesus, and discovered a deeper meaning to forgiveness. I know Jesus had forgiven me from the Cross. And although I had always accepted that as a fact I had never really internalized self-forgiveness. I needed to dig deep into the faith of my youth to remember that I have always been and will always be the lamb The Good Shepherd holds tenderly in His arms.

As a mother and grandmother, God has again revealed the depths of love that He/She has for me- God loves me unconditionally. If I know how to love my children and grandchildren deeply and fully, and know how to forgive them and love them, how much more does God love me and forgive me.

Past pain and present upsets have and will continue to try to rob me of joy. As I practice my daily readings, meditation and share with others, I am sustained by a sense of gratitude for the gift of love God has and continues to shower on me.

I have learned that deep love, boundless joy and the calm of serenity can be mine as I accept the gift of self-forgiveness and in turn forgive others.

Today I find new meaning in the words Jesus spoke so long ago: "Father, forgive them for they know now what they do."