

**Palm Sunday C  
Luke 23: 1-49  
March 28, 2010**

**“Father, forgive them. They don’t know what they are doing ...”**

**After the arrest, the trial, the whipping, the mockery, after the long haul up to the top of Skull Hill, after the nails are pounded, and the three men are suspended from their crosses, Jesus speaks.**

**“Father, forgive them. They don’t know what they are doing.”**

**Jesus is condemned, punished and crucified, destined to die a slow, smothering death. And yet the words that come from his lips in the midst of the condemnation, the heart of the punishment, the height of the cross, are words of forgiveness, acceptance and love.**

**“Father, forgive them. They don’t know what they are doing.”**

**Forgive them. Forgive them for yielding to the stress, the tension, all the anxiety in the air. For filling with hatred of something good. For caving in to the fear of something uncontrollable. For three years, God has been let loose in the world in the person of Jesus of Nazareth -- stirring things up, making things whole, shaking up the system. Threatening privilege, preferring the poor, speaking with women and Samaritans and anyone else who gets the second class treatment. Proclaiming the year of God’s favor – the year when all that is wrong will be put to rights, when all that is broken will be healed, when all that is captive will be set free, when all that has rebelled will be forgiven.**

**Jesus has been showing the world what God is like, and the world doesn’t like it.**

**Forgive them. They don’t know what they are doing. They don’t understand that they are sick, riddled with fear as if by a cancer. They don’t understand that they are prisoners, prisoners who hold the key to their freedom in their grasp and then fling it away through the bars.**

**They can't rise to the challenge Jesus has set before them. They can't believe in the world that Jesus has promised them. So once again humankind flexes its puny muscles to prove that it is smarter than God, wiser than God, stronger than God, slicker and swifter and sneakier than God.**

**And the nails go through the hands. Boom. Boom. And boom. Through the feet.**

**"Father, forgive them. They don't know what they are doing..."**

**Forgive them. All of them – those who told him they loved him, but who then turned out to be frauds. Forgive Judas who got it all mixed up, who got frightened, who got greedy, who turned on the one who had never done him any harm, who betrayed his dear friend, who mutinied against his master. Forgive Peter, who meant well, who really wanted to go to prison for Jesus, who was even ready to die for Jesus, except he wasn't really. He panicked. His drive for self-preservation won out over his love and loyalty. He wasn't as strong as he thought he was. Peter the rock turned out to be a crumbling pile of chalk.**

**Forgive them. Forgive Herod, who was only curious, really. Who only wanted to stay up with the latest fads. Herod was looking for another pet holy man, first, to play with, then to despise ... someone like John the Baptist, only with better tricks. And forgive Pilate too -- that crafty, venial government official, who discovered that reason was no defense against an angry mob, who learned that caving in to the crowd just worked better for him than standing up to them did.**

**Forgive them. Forgive the priests, the scribes, the Pharisees, the old guard of the Jewish world who wanted their religion, their lifestyle, and their privileges to remain intact. Who couldn't cope with change; who were threatened by the promise of new life. Who couldn't see that the very one they had been waiting for was standing right before their eyes. They couldn't see Jesus because all their expectations had made them blind.**

**Forgive them. Forgive all those angry, hostile people in the crowd, caught up in the adrenaline of the moment, no longer individuals, but one murderous organism screaming for blood. Forgive the mob that has no mind, no will, no boundaries. Forgive the people in that mob, possessed by a sick unity around a scapegoat.**

**Forgive them. Forgive Barabbas, who was happy to take his freedom at another's expense. Forgive Simon of Cyrene, who submitted to his sudden slavery instead of resisting the power of the military. Forgive the women, wailing and screaming, carrying on. It gave them something to do, on that long, hot Friday. It made them feel important.**

**Forgive them. Forgive the criminals, the one who cursed and the one who blessed. Forgive them their crimes, their offenses against Jesus and all those others. Forgive the soldiers for the mocking, the binding, the driving of the nails, for looking down at the clothes and rolling dice instead of looking up at suffering, dying Jesus and weeping for their action. For allowing their lives to harden them until they were barely even human anymore.**

**“Father forgive them. They don't know what they are doing.”**

**Jesus watched it all, experienced it all, understood it all. He longed for it to be different, but he accepted it for how it was. And then he forgave it. All of it. All of them.**

**And as he hung there, arms stretched wide open like an embrace, the forgiveness just kept coming, pouring out of that one man on that one cross on that one day on that one hill. Forgive them. They don't know what they're doing. It poured out backward, into history. Forgive them. Forgive the Roman invaders, the Greek invaders, the Babylonian and Assyrian invaders. Forgive the Egyptian pharaoh and every slave driver's hand ever raised against an Israelite. Forgive. Forgive.**

**It poured out forward, into the future. Forgive them. The barbarian hordes, the Vikings, the Huns. Forgive the conquistadors and inquistors, the colonizers and the missionaries. Forgive the masterminds of the Holocaust and the inventors of the atom bomb. Forgive. Forgive.**

**The forgiveness kept coming. Every hand raised against a child. Every heart that spurned another. Every playground taunting. Every act of adultery. Every theft. Every injury. Every cruelty committed by one lowly person against another. Forgive. Forgive.**

**In that moment, on that day, God watched his children at their worst and saw them for exactly what they were. Children. Broken, battered, cruel, confused, wounded, violent children. Children who could not see their own crippled souls, their own distorted values. Children who did not know what they were doing. But God saw them. He understood them. And he loved them anyway.**

**And in that moment, there was nothing – nothing in humanity -- that did not come within the reach of that saving embrace. Nothing. No action too heinous to be forgiven. No hurt too deep to be healed. He held it all. He loved it all. He claimed it all.**

**“Father, forgive them. They don’t know what they are doing.”**

**Father, forgive us. We don’t know what we are doing either.**