



**TOUCH POINT**

## **Father, Forgive US, For WE Know Not What WE Do – Touchpoint for November 16, 2022**

**Luke 23:33-43 (NRSVUE)** *When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”*

*And they cast lots to divide his clothing. And the people stood by watching, but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!”*

*The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine<sup>37</sup> 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 there kept deriding him and saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!”*

*But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom.” He replied, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”*

This coming Sunday is Christ the King Sunday, the Sunday we proclaim Christ as ruler of all. This passage gives us insight into Christ’s governing philosophy.

### **Grace and peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.**

*“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”*

It has always been one of the most powerful bible verses for me. If you ever wonder what are the limits of God’s forgiveness, look no further than this verse. In the face of the torture, mocking, and murder of God’s beloved child, forgiveness is pronounced. In the face of us – humanity – doing the worst possible thing we can possibly do – inflict death on another, forgiveness is pronounced.

Read this verse, and then talk to me about the limits of God’s forgiveness.

And so, I originally thought this was going to be a fairly easy, straightforward touchpoint, but then I kept on reading. And what I thought was clear and straightforward got twisted a little. Which is what usually happens when you read the Bible. You think you have it all figured out, and then something else comes along to bend you out of shape.

I was struck by the following verses that follow this word of forgiveness. They are words of mockery spoken to Jesus to “Save Himself.” And not just once but multiple times, from every direction. The common people and their leaders, the Roman soldiers, the thief next to him. All screaming the word “Save!”

And I was struck by the contrast of this. The juxtaposition of a couple of words that Luke seems to be setting up almost in opposition to each other – ‘Forgiveness’ and ‘Saving.’

And I'm not sure what to do with it. So let me just share some thoughts and see where it takes us.

Jesus is adamant about forgiving. *"Father, forgive them."*

The people are adamant about saving. *"Save yourself!"* they keep saying over and over.

It's almost as if Luke is separating the two. Showing them to be opposing ideas. Which one is going to win out – forgiveness or personal salvation?

And like I said, I'm not sure what to do with this.

Because I've always thought of Jesus as my 'personal Savior.' One of my favorite hymns growing up was "Beautiful Savior." I went to Japan after college as a missionary to 'Save' people. Aren't we in the business of 'Saving individuals' souls'?

But in this passage today, Jesus seems more interested in forgiving than saving. And now, I'm beginning to wonder if I somehow haven't put my focus in the wrong place at times.

Now I don't want to go too far off with this. There are many bible verses that speak of Jesus as savior. And Jesus does save people from disease, demonic possession, and death. He saves them from hunger and running out of wine. And if you're a guest at a wedding, the odds are you would much rather your host be saved from running out of wine, than you having to forgive them for actually running out.

But I want us to think about what it might mean if we spent a little more time reflecting on forgiveness rather than salvation in our faith life. Jesus says, "Forgive them." They say, "Save yourself."

They would rather have him place self-preservation ahead of forgiveness. That would justify their way of life. It would justify our way of life. Putting oneself first.

But to live from 'forgiveness' means to live by grace, not self-preservation.

So, what if Christianity isn't so much about saving oneself, but about forgiving others?

When it comes down to either saving oneself or forgiving others, Jesus forgives. So we don't walk in the footsteps of a savior, but a forgiver.

Jesus is constantly causing a Copernican revolution. Moving me outside of myself and into relationship with others. Moving me outside of my spiritual narcissism. From "How do I save myself?" or "How do I get saved?" to "How am I forgiven?" or "Who do I need to forgive?"

Again, Jesus is given the option of saving himself or forgiving others, and he chooses forgiveness.

So who wants to walk in his footsteps? Are you willing to give up your desire to save yourself (not that it is within your power)? Are you willing to die into forgiveness? I'm not. Which is why I'm glad Jesus put forgiving me ahead of his own salvation.

And what if we, as a Church, as Christians, focused not on saving ourselves and others, what if we focused on our being forgiven and forgiving others? Do you think the world might see us differently?

What's the difference between someone coming up to you and saying, "I'm here to save you," or instead saying, "I'm here to be in a forgiving relationship with you"?

Saving is so often thought of as a rescuing **from**. Forgiveness is a moving **into**. They are entirely different directions in our common understanding.

Jesus chooses to move further into human existence, rather than extract himself from it. Where does my faith move me? Further into the world or separating me from it?

You see, when forgiveness is the focus rather than saving oneself, then the focus isn't on some other worldly, future place and time, but the focus is on here and now.

This earth, you and me, become the focus of forgiveness, reconciliation, healing and wholeness.

Which is the original meaning of the word 'saving' or 'salvation.'

The word 'salvation' literally means 'healing,' 'wholeness.' It is about a restoration of, a putting back together of. It isn't so much about a rescuing from, or a separating from.

And if we see the word 'salvation' or 'saving' in this way, as restoration, then it can't be separated from forgiveness. Because forgiveness heals a situation. Forgiveness can make whole that which is broken.

Forgiveness and salvation then, both have an emphasis on the whole. The unity of all. They are two sides of the same coin. And perhaps that is why Jesus won't save 'himself.' Because one can never just save 'oneself.' Salvation is not an individual endeavor or individual achievement.

Salvation, healing, wholeness can only occur in relationship to **all others**, and in relationship to the **whole world**.

And so, if we speak of the Christ as being "all, and in all," as St. Paul so often does, then the Christ is a collective self. And if Jesus is going to save himself, he has to take us with him. All of us. And the entirety of our human existence. Birth, life, AND DEATH.

Is this the reason the human Jesus doesn't save his individual self in life, so that the universal Christ can save its collective self through his death and resurrection? And the entire human story can be restored?

Is this the reason Jesus won't consider his saving until after he can say about the incarnation, "*IT IS FINISHED*," and he dies on the cross?

Only then can all of the human story be restored. Birth, life, AND DEATH. It isn't just life that needs to be transformed and restored, but death as well.

And so, if Jesus is going to save himself, he will have to bring a thief along with him. He will have to bring sinners along with him. He will have to bring us along with him... along with all life and all death.

The becoming flesh at Christmas must entail the dying of Good Friday. The incarnation is the total marriage of the Divine with the created world and its entire experience, including death.

Is this why "in the night in which he was betrayed" he didn't seek to save himself? But instead took bread and wine and said, "This is me," and placed himself within his betraying, denying, doubting and cowardly disciples?

Is this why he offered a cup of forgiveness instead of looking for an escape hatch?

Because of the incarnation... his salvation, his healing and wholeness is inextricably linked to ours.  
Because of the incarnation... he unites with us in our brokenness so we will be united with him in his healing and wholeness.

This is what Paul means when he says, "Since he has united himself to us in our death, we will be united with him in his resurrection."

The incarnation means the Mystery has chosen to make Paradise a place where we are all one with Him, because He has become one with all of us. "*Christ is all and in all.*"

The Mystery has chosen to make Paradise a place that includes us all. Even the thieves and executioners who mock Jesus.

And so, His final prayer...

*"Father, forgive them. For they know not what they do."*

David Tiede once wrote:

*"Jesus is God's way of ruling in this world and in the world to come."*

Which means we have a God who is not interested in self-preservation, and separating from humanity, but being in a fully connected, a fully membered relationship with all of humanity and the total human experience. For all of eternity, no matter what it takes. And forgiveness is at the heart of this, not self-preservation.

Soooo ... is it ironic, or just sad, that we have built a religion focused on saving one's individual self, based on a guy who refused to save his individual self?

***"Father forgive US. For WE know not what WE do."***

But thank God... Jesus and the Father know what **THEY** are doing.

**Amen.**

***Spirit in the Desert***  
**Opening Songs**

**Be Still**

(London Fox Taize Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God

**You Lord Are In This Place**

(Keith Duke)

You Lord are in 1)...this place.  
2)...my heart. 3)...my mind. 4)...my life.  
Your presence fills it.  
Your presence is peace.

**Bible Passage**

*(A passage takes us from one place to another)*

**Touchpoint**

*(Where God's story touches our life story)*

**Lead Me, Lord**

(Discovery Singers)

Lead me, Lord. Lead me in thy righteousness. Make thy way plain before my face. For it is thou, Lord, thou Lord only, that makest me to dwell in safety.

**The Meal**

**The Lord's Prayer**

(Taize Reflections)

**Benediction**

**The Lord Bless You and Keep You**

(National Lutheran Choir, Peter C. Lukin)

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord lift his countenance upon you. And give you peace.  
The Lord make his face to shine upon you. And be gracious unto you. The Lord be gracious unto you. Amen.