

## Good Friday April 2

## Forgiven

### Luke 23:32-43

32 Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed.

33 When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left.

34 Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

35 The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One.”

36 The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar

37 and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.”

38 There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourself and us!”

40 But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence?”

41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”

42 Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

43 Jesus answered him, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Yesterday we revisited the story of the Prodigal Son, who sees the enormous error of his ways, goes back home and finds that he is RESTORED in the arms of his loving father. It is also a story of forgiveness: the son has grievously wronged his father and, indeed, the whole family. By his wilful actions he has brought shame upon them all in the eyes of the community. Jesus’ first audience might well have expected the father to deal very severely with this disgraceful young man. Instead, he finds that he has been FORGIVEN.

From there the jump to the sins perpetrated on Jesus on that first Good Friday is not as big as we might have originally thought. When Jesus cries out “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” we would be wrong to apply the words only to the soldiers dividing up his clothes, no feeling for their victim, simply doing their job. It’s not ‘someone else’ who crucified him: the one who dies on the cross is all alone - abandoned by the authorities, by a howling mob, by fearful disciples, by the religious establishment. All are involved, not in a straightforward miscarriage of justice. The Saviour of the world has been rejected by everyone, enthusiastically consigned to what is arguably the cruellest and most excruciating means of execution every devised. Crucifixion was also designed to humiliate: crucifixions took place beside roads or on hillsides, where everyone would see them: the soldiers divided Jesus’ clothing because, like others, he was crucified naked: the humiliation was complete.

And Jesus says “Father, forgive them ...” So now we see how scandalous is the message of the cross at the heart of the Christian faith. And it means we have to face up to ways in which we have castrated that message. Thank you, Lord, for forgiving me – well, I know I’ve never done anything really bad so that’s all right then, isn’t it? But surely, Lord, you can’t compare *me* with that guy I read about in the papers, did time for murder and then he says he became a Christian in prison. Well, he would say that, wouldn’t he? He just wanted an easier life inside, angling to have his sentence reduced for good behaviour. Just wait till he wants to come to *my* church! We don’t want the likes of him around our place ...

A man was once serving a long prison sentence for a murder he had committed. In jail he became a Christian. He studied theology. After release, the day eventually came when he went forward for ordination training. A few years later, the appointments committee met members of a church looking for a new minister. They told them about this man. 'Will you have him as your minister?' they asked.

What answer would you have given?

They answered: "Yes, we will."