

April, 2016

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I am writing to you on Wednesday of Holy Week. I think all the prayers have been written, hymns selected, messages written, and bulletins printed for all the services is now complete. I can take it easy now ... rest and relax this evening or can I?

There is one message that will not let me move on. It's the one for Good Friday at the 1:00 service; the title is, "*Father, forgive them.*" One of the remarkable things about what is happening on the cross is the very fact that Jesus is praying! We pray in church, when we go to bed, at the table before a meal – but on the cross?

Crucifixion was used to provide the maximum embarrassment, pain, and suffering on a person's body so as to dissuade anyone from ever doing what the person being crucified had done. A person was stripped naked, an ultimate shame for any modest Jew, and either tied or nailed to the cross. To make matters worse, the person was then hoisted up high so their condition could be viewed from afar. Death actually resulted from exposure, shock, and eventual suffocation occurred when the body was so exhausted that breathing in that position was no longer possible.

Yet in this agony, Jesus prayed to forgive them!

I wonder how many times he prayed it.

Did he pray it when they flogged him with the cat-o'-nine-tails?

Did he pray it when they thrust a crown of thorns upon his head, put a purple robe around his shoulders, and mocked him by saying, "Hail, King of the Jews"?

Do you suppose he prayed that prayer as he was carrying his cross up the hill?

Do you suppose he prayed that prayer when he looked into the angry faces shouting, "If you really are the Son of God, come down from the cross"?

How many times did Jesus pray that prayer?

We are all frail; we tend to strike out when we are hurt. But if we pay attention to our lesson for Good Friday we learn that even when we strike out in anger or fear, the cross of Christ calls us to pull back and reassess our feelings. As followers of Christ we are to be examples of forgiveness, even and especially when it is the hardest.

I pray you arrive at Easter knowing how much you are loved.

*Pastor Peggy*