

**Seven Simple Truths of Life:**  
*Six of Life's Most Important Words*  
 Luke 23:34; Colossians 3:13  
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Today we are going to partake in Communion.

Here at Tipp City UMC we celebrate an open table – that means that everyone is welcome to partake of the elements – of the bread and cup – as we experience God's grace together at his table.

As we take the elements, it gives us a chance to reflect, remember and celebrate Jesus. His death and His resurrection.

I want us to take a look at this death and resurrection pattern today as we look at the subject of forgiveness.

And here is why.

**Forgiveness is at the center of everything that Jesus was and is.  
 It is central to what living a life in God looks like.**

So before we tackle this subject – Let's pray!

Turn with me to Luke 23 verse 34 pg \_\_\_\_.

In Luke 23 we see Jesus hanging on a cross.

He has been beaten, betrayed, had his friends turn their backs on him, His close friend, Judas, has basically sold him out.

He has been flogged, mocked, spit upon and nailed to a cross.

And here in the midst of such agony and horrific pain, such betrayal and torture:

Look at what Jesus says in verse 34

***“Father, forgive these people because they don't know what they are doing.”***

I find it absolutely amazing that this is what is foremost on Jesus' mind at this time.

**Forgiveness.**

In his moment of greatest wounding, agony, injustice and excruciating pain, Jesus is interested in forgiveness.

My sermon is entitled Six of Life's Most Important Words.

Let me give you those words so you don't sit there and wonder what they are and miss out on some of what God is hopefully going to speak to our hearts today.

Here are the words – I am sorry and I forgive you.

**Say those after me – I am sorry I forgive you.**

Wasn't that easy to repeat after me?

Saying those words is easy isn't it!

Especially if you don't have to mean them.

**Meaning them is a whole lot more complicated, wouldn't you agree.**

9:15 (This morning I want to take a look at a video that we have watched before but I think it shows forgiveness better than any explanation I could give.)  
Let me set it up a little bit first.

8 and 10:30 – (There is a great film entitled *Karla Faye Tucker* that tells the story of this woman and the brother of one of the women she murders.)

On February 3, 1998, Karla Faye Tucker was put to death by the state of Texas, the first woman to be executed in America in 15 years. She was a confessed pick-axe murderer. But in prison, her life dramatically changed through a religious conversion experience. She found God. This former drug-crazed prostitute and savage killer became what many saw as a fully rehabilitated and beautiful, loving person.

Ron Thornton, is the brother of Deborah, one of the persons that Karla Faye killed.

(Well, Let's let Ron tell his story).

Ron also has a conversion experience and finds the Lord in his life. In the film he tells how his unforgiving heart was leading him to hate-filled and angry thoughts and actions. He goes to see Karla Faye before she is executed and tells her that he forgives her. She tells him that she is sorry. Both of them are set free in their hearts - with God's help.

### **Forgiveness is setting someone free and finding out that it was actually you.**

Forgiveness is looking deep within yourself at your heart and releasing someone from the debt they owe you because of what they did to you.

Forgiveness sets you free from the root of bitterness that leads to anger and hatred – just as it did Deborah's brother, Ron.

I believe choosing forgiveness is one of the most difficult things God asks us to do, especially if we believe that whoever hurt us is in the wrong and doesn't deserve to be forgiven.

Wouldn't you agree?

I believe that part of the reason it is so hard to do is because we don't truly understand what forgiveness is and what it is not.

Let's take a look at a few things that forgiveness is NOT first:

### **Forgiveness is not condoning.**

It is not pretending like what the person did is not wrong, hurtful, or evil.

Sometimes I think we are frightened that if we forgive it will send a message that what the person did to us was not that big of a deal.

I don't believe that Deborah's brother condoned what Karla Faye did even though he forgave her.

### **Forgiveness is not necessarily forgetting.**

Hopefully you can do that but it is not always possible.

Sometimes it is not even helpful.

The person who hurt us may need help and to forget will not help them.

I don't believe that Deborah's brother will ever forget what Karla Faye did do you?

And forgetting would not have helped Karla Faye, she needed to receive help for her transgressions so she would not do them again and in prison is where she found that help and found Christ.

In Hebrews 10:17 even the Lord does not say to us I will forget your sin but he says, "I will remember it no more."

**That is not the same as forgetting.**

**I think it is better actually.**

God forgives and He makes the choice to remember no more  
– to not hold it against us.

Forgiving is not forgetting.

Forgetting may be a long term by-product of forgiving but it is not the same. What God says to each of us and what he wants us to say to each other is,

“I will not let the past dictate the present.”

**Forgiveness does not always include reconciliation.**

You see it takes 2 to reconcile.

You may ask someone to forgive you and they may not do it.

Reconciliation may not be possible.

Reconciliation takes all sorts of mutual agreement and work.

The Bible tells us in Romans 12, “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”

As far as it depends on you.

Reconciliation depends on two people not one.

Forgiveness only requires one person, you, to forgive the other or to say I am sorry.

**Forgiveness doesn't mean that the person may not have to suffer consequences for what they did.**

Karla Faye did. In 1998, she was the first women to be executed in Texas in 15 years.

She had found forgiveness in Christ and been set free.

She had been forgiven by Deborah's brother Ron for killing his sister.

But she still had to pay the consequences for her actions.

Let me tell you what forgiveness is.

**Forgiveness is a process.**

It is a series of steps, some of which need to be retraced many times.

It takes time.

It is the restoring of an attitude of love and a releasing of a painful past.

It repudiates revenge and reopens the future to the possibility of a restored relationship.

**It is costly and it is hard.**

We live in response to what has happened to us.

The wound can be very deep and you may have been living with that hurt for a long time.

You need to develop new ways to cope and live with that hurt and so forgiving is a process.

You may even need or benefit from having someone help you get past some of those wounds and hurts.

Christ is hanging from the cross on Calvary and the first words he speaks are, **Father forgive them.**

There was no questioning the reality of His wounds.

There was no doubting the pain of the injury or the injustice.

There is no doubting that He was sinned against, that He was innocent.

The same is true for you this morning.

Jesus does not doubt your pain.

He does not deny the reality of the injury or the injustice.

He does not even refute the fact that you may be the innocent party.  
The issue is not the existence of the pain, the injury or the injustice.

**The issue is in fact – what are you going to do with that debt...  
that debt of pain, injury and injustice?**

You see our first reaction; our knee-jerk reaction is **to give it back** isn't it?

Come on – be honest – I am not the only one who feels this way.

Someone has hurt me so I will hurt them.

Someone has offended me so I will offend them.

And that back and forth cycle can go on and on – sometimes for years until we can't even remember what the original hurt was.

**That my friends, is called revenge.**

Sometimes for one reason or another, we can't repay the one who hurt us so we let our anger or revenge **spill out on those around us**.

Often it is those we love the most, our spouse, our children, our friends.

We can't hurt the one who hurt us so we will share our anger with all those around us - a little at a time.

**We try to suppress that hurt or anger but it just keeps splashing out.**

Or rather than forgive we **carry our hurt with us**.

We internalize it.

And it wears on us.

It causes us to have a lower self-esteem; it makes us weary and exhausted.

It depletes our energy.

Because we just can't let it go and so we keep holding on to it for dear life.

Christ tells us there is another way.

The Bible tells us there is another way to deal with our hurts and injustices.

**We can forgive.**

**In fact God tells us in Colossians that we are to remember that the Lord forgave us and so we must forgive others.**

He is not asking – he is commanding.

Tim Keller in his book, *The Reason for God*, says,

***“Forgiveness means refusing to make them pay for what they did.”***

*“However, to refrain from lashing out at someone when you want to do so with all your being is agony.*

*It is a form of suffering.”*

Have you ever felt that suffering?

I know I have.

*“You are absorbing the debt, taking the cost of it completely on yourself instead of taking it out on the other person.*

*It hurts terribly.*

*Many people would say that it feels like a kind of death.*

*Yes, but it is a death that leads to resurrection instead of the life long living death of bitterness and cynicism.”*

As a young child, my grandfather abused me.  
 I blocked this reality from my mind for many years. In fact I still have years I can't recall completely.  
 Although I couldn't remember it, it colored my world for many years as I carried this hurt and injustice with me.  
 By the time I would finally remember the hurt and remember who it was who had caused me this pain, my grandfather was dead.  
 For years my life had seemed exhausting and wearisome and I didn't even know why.  
 Once I fully realized why, I became angry and somewhat bitter.  
**Look at how he had stolen my youth and my innocence.**  
 As I no longer wanted to carry this hurt and injustice inside me anymore,  
 I splashed some of that anger out on those around me as I dealt with it.  
 It would take me almost 10 years before I would work through this anger and hurt. That forgiveness process.  
 Almost 10 years before I could say I forgave him.  
 There was definitely suffering and agony involved in those years and I had to die a death of sorts believe me.  
 But when I finally did say it and mean it, I was the one who was set free, who was resurrected.  
 I was the one who was alive again.  
 When I let Grandpa off the hook, when I let the hurt die, when I absorbed the debt, I became truly alive.  
 I was resurrected in my spirit. I was no longer the person I had been.  
 With God's help, I forgave and became a new person.  
 My heart danced with joy.

Parker Palmer in his book, "Paradox" says:

*"...The cross says, "The pain stops here."*

*The way of the cross is a way of absorbing pain, not passing it on, a way that transforms pain from destructive impulse into creative power."*

Destructive impulse pays back, it takes revenge.

Destructive impulse says, "You did this to me so watch out because man am I going to give it back to you."

Destructive impulse says, "You hurt me but I am going to explode on you."

Creative power is, "I am going to forgive you and when I do I will have experienced God's love in such new and transforming ways that I will no longer see you as I had before because I don't see me the same way I did.

Creative power is redeeming love with God's help.

It transforms you.

Parker Palmer goes on to say,

*"When Jesus accepted the cross, his death opened up a channel for the redeeming power of love."*

**When we choose to forgive we enter into Christ's pattern of death and resurrection.**

We let the pain stop here.

We absorb the debt.

We let destructive impulse rest and we let creative power loose.

The cross is the ultimate symbol of forgiveness.

When we take someone who has wronged us and we lay them at the foot of the cross and forgive them – we are saying the pain stops here.

Redeeming love, creative power reigns and destructive impulse dies.

**When we forgive we do more than just say we believe in Christ, we actually enter into his world.**

We enter into his suffering.

We put to death destructive impulse and we are resurrected into redeeming love.

And friends when you and I do that we are not the same.

We are transformed, we are liberated, we are set free, we are resurrected into new life.

When you and I learn to forgive as Christ forgave – lives are changed, Homes are transformed, churches are liberated, society is changed, nations are changed. Forgiveness is personal but as more and more people say I am sorry and I forgive you – forgiveness becomes communal and societal and global.

That's why the world cheered when Nelson Mandela was released from prison.

That's why the nation took notice when Amish children were gunned down by a madman who also took his life, and then watched as the Amish people, although heartbroken and grieving, went to the widow of the man and offered their forgiveness.

The church is God's redeeming agent of love and forgiveness in the world and the world needs desperately to see it in action.

Because when they do – people are transformed.

And it has to start with each one of us refusing to follow our destructive impulses and instead release our creative power, through God's redeeming love.

As we come to the table this morning I invite you to reflect, remember and celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus.

More than that however, I invite you to truly enter into Jesus' death and resurrection.

Allow Christ's redeeming love to flow into you, to flow through you, to transform you.

Maybe you need to lay someone at the foot of the cross this morning and say I forgive you.

Perhaps it is you that you need to forgive.

Maybe you need to tell someone you are sorry.

Maybe you need to ask for God's help to take that first step in the forgiveness process this morning.

Wherever you are, God is there.

Resources: *The Reason for God* by Tim Keller, *The Promise of Paradox* by Parker Palmer, Rob Bell – Mars Hill, the Bible.