

# Forgiveness and the Cross

Jesus' crucifixion on the day we call Good Friday is about Justice and Forgiveness, motivated by Love. God loved us so much that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Why did He die? Because of God's justice. God is pure and holy, and had declared in the Old Testament that He would "by no means clear the guilty." He said, "the soul that sins shall die." God is just, so He can't just wink at our sin or say, "Oh, never mind about that."

But at the same time, God loves us with an everlasting love, and wants to be with us forever. So God came up with an ingenious plan in which Jesus would come to earth, take on flesh and blood like us, and then die in our place to take our punishment. Justice is served.

Now, because justice has been served, Jesus can offer us forgiveness. He paid the price, and now, in His love, He offers to expunge our record of sin and declare us "not guilty." Wow. What love. What mercy. We don't deserve it at all, yet complete forgiveness is what Jesus offers to you and me today.

Before we participate in communion this morning let me give you a couple of examples of God's forgiveness of unworthy sinners like me.

In my devotions a while ago I came across a discussion of Pontius Pilate in an article by Kevin Butcher in History Today.

Pontius Pilate is a central figure in the events of Jesus' crucifixion. He condemned Jesus to death. He stood by while his soldiers mocked and beat Jesus. He had Him flogged and crucified. But did you ever wonder what happened to Pilate after this? The historian Josephus said Pilate was recalled to Rome to explain his mishandling of a Samaritan riot in 36AD. But we hear nothing about him after this.

About a hundred years later a document began to circulate among Christians called, "The Acts of Pilate". This document, allegedly derived from Pilate's own records, says that he and his wife became

believers in Jesus. Tertullian, the great Christian theologian & apologist shortly after this time, was convinced of this. So was Saint Augustine a couple of hundred years later. While most Christians in the *west* didn't believe the "Acts of Pilate", the Eastern Orthodox church did, making Pilate's wife a saint. The Coptic & Ethiopian Christians went even further and canonized Pilate. Can you imagine that, "Saint Pilate"? His feast day in much of the middle east and Africa is the 25th of the summer month of Sanne, a day shared with his wife Procla and the saints Jude, Peter and Paul.

Most theologians today discount this document as fake. There is really no way to prove what it says. I am always suspect of documents like this, so please understand that I am not presenting the "Acts of Pilate" as fact. It's in a class of documents called New Testament apocryphal writings. The fact that some Christians believed it is interesting at best. But in the end, the fate of Pontius Pilate remains a mystery.

But just think about it. If he did become a Christian, wouldn't this be the ultimate act of forgiveness on God's part?

We have other examples of this extreme forgiveness in the Bible. In Acts 6:7 we read that many of the Jewish priests (some of whom probably called for Jesus' crucifixion) became believers.

The thief crucified next to Jesus mocked Him, then turned silent. That silence then turned to repentance and he was immediately welcomed into God's kingdom (Mark 15:32 & Luke 23:42-43).

And Rabbi Saul of Tarsus persecuted & killed Christians (Acts 7:58, 8:3 & 9:1,2), yet he became the Apostle Paul.

A modern-day example of forgiveness happened on October 2, 2006, when a man walked into an Amish schoolhouse in Lancaster, PA and shot 10 little girls between the ages of 6 and 13 and then killed himself.

In the midst of their grief over this shocking loss, the Amish community didn't cast blame, they didn't point fingers, they didn't hold a press conference with attorneys at their sides. Instead, they reached out with grace and compassion toward the family of the man who killed their children.

The afternoon of the shooting an Amish grandfather of one of the girls who was killed expressed forgiveness toward the killer, Charles Roberts. That same day Amish neighbors went and visited the Roberts family to comfort them in their sorrow and pain.

Later that week the Roberts family was invited to the funeral of one of the Amish girls who had been killed. And at Charles Robert's funeral Amish mourners outnumbered the non-Amish as they came to express their compassion and forgiveness.

This kind of forgiveness can only come from God. Aren't you glad God's forgiveness goes this deep? It can forgive whatever you've done, too.

One thing we can say for certain...IF Pontius Pilate did ask God to forgive him, he most assuredly would have received it.

The same is true for you and me. Though we were still sinners, Christ died for us. And while the wages of our sin is death, the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. He forgives us.

As we turn to the table of the Lord to celebrate communion together let us do so with the deepest sense of gratitude for the very expensive forgiveness that we received from God.

The Apostle Paul writes this about communion in 1 Cor. 11:23-26:

*“For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night He was betrayed, took bread, <sup>24</sup> and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.”*

*<sup>25</sup> In the same way, after supper He took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” <sup>26</sup> For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.”*

- 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

God, we thank you for your indescribable gift. Amen.

Reference: [www.historytoday.com/kevin-butcher/strange-afterlife-pontius-pilate](http://www.historytoday.com/kevin-butcher/strange-afterlife-pontius-pilate)

The Amish quickly forgave the man who murdered 10 Amish school girls ([lancasterpa.com/amish/amish-forgiveness/](http://lancasterpa.com/amish/amish-forgiveness/)).