

**Jesus' School of Prayer**  
**"Excruciating Prayer"**  
November 1, 2020

**Overarching theme:** In 2020, FUMC will be a **GO** church!

**Instructions:**

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.

**Core Point:**

The past is the past. There is nothing that can be done about it. The past can only be used to gain wisdom for the future. What can change is the future. When we, as God's people, are willing to follow God in our daily lives, God will make a good way in the future. The way may be bumpy at times and have curves, but the process will be filled with God's love and grace.

**Reflect on these Scriptures:**

**Luke 23:34a CEB<sup>34</sup>** *Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing."*

**Matthew 27:46 NIV<sup>46</sup>** *About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eli, Eli,<sup>[a]</sup> lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?").<sup>[b]</sup>*

**Luke 23:46 CEB<sup>46</sup>** *Crying out in a loud voice, Jesus said, "Father, into your hands I entrust my life."<sup>[a]</sup> After he said this, he breathed for the last time.*

**Commentary**

**Luke 23:34a** – In Luke's account, the first thing the crucified Jesus does is pray for those who have crucified him. Although the presence of v. 34a makes the change of subject to the soldiers in the latter part of the verse rough, it fits well following the report of the crucifixion in the previous verse. The setting raises the question of who Jesus was praying for: the Romans, the Jewish leaders, or both? The immediate context of the prayer requires that Jesus was praying for the soldiers who carried out the execution – they are the easiest to fit under the category of ignorance of what they were doing. Throughout, however, Luke has emphasized the role of the Jewish leaders (22:1-6, 52, 66; 23:4, 10, 13), and in the end the people are swayed to join in calling for Jesus' death (23:18). Moreover, through the speeches in Acts, Luke repeatedly maintains that the Jewish leaders acted out of

ignorance (e.g., Acts 3:17; cf. 13:27). Thus Jesus' prayer should be understood as asking forgiveness for all who were involved in his death.

The prayer is consistent with both Luke's characterization of Jesus and Luke's style. Jesus has prayed to God as "Father" repeatedly in Luke (10:21; 11:2; 22:42; 23:46), and Jesus has taught his followers to forgive.

**Matthew 27:46** – Jesus' second prayer from the cross is the first line of Psalm 22, a lament of a suffering righteous person who calls out for divine vindication. The psalm itself goes on to promise and celebrate, the Gentiles themselves finally joining in the celebration. The Matthean reader, who knows the whole story, can rightfully think of Psalm 22 as an outline of the whole cross/resurrection salvation-event, which leads to the Gentile mission. But the Matthean Jesus should not be pictured as merely reciting the opening line for an outline of salvation history. The human Jesus is pictured as dying with a cry of anguish and abandonment on his lips, and yet not of despair. In the darkness and pain, he still addresses his lament to God, and as "my God."

**Luke 23:46** – Luke also clarifies that the inarticulate "loud cry" in Mark 15:37 is actually a prayer of consecration: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." The prayer is a quotation of Ps 31:5. Handed over "into the hands of men" (9:44), Jesus now commends himself to the hands of God (cf. 1:71, 74). Fittingly, in Luke Jesus does not die with a cry of abandonment but with full confidence in the One whom he addressed as "Father" (cf. 10:21-22; 11:2, 13; 12:30, 32; 22:42; 23:34). Prayer has been the leitmotif of Jesus' ministry, most recently on the Mount of Olives the night before he dies (22:42) and in his prayer for forgiveness for those who "do not know what they are doing" (23:34). And what Jesus said in the darkness would be proclaimed from the housetops (see 12:3). Jesus' serenity in the face of death becomes a model for Stephen, the first Christian martyr, who at this death also prays. "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7:59 NIV).  
– adapted from the New Interpreter's Bible Commentary, IX, p. 455; VIII, p. 492; IX, p. 461

**This week** – Excruciating Prayer.

Crucifixion is likely one of the most agonizing, excruciating means of capital punishment ever devised. Borrowed from the Persians, Rome perfected it as the ultimate means of deterrent – reserved for slaves, traitors, revolutionaries and others Rome deemed deserving of death by torture.

Along with the slow painful process of suffocation (laboring for every breath over a period of hours/days) the nails were intentionally driven into the wrist adjacent to the nerve, which would send a surge of pain throughout the body with every movement.

So naturally, most people being crucified would curse or call down curses upon the perpetrators. Some really pious people might pray for themselves. But one person prayed, not just for himself, but for others. He was so unique that a hardened Roman Centurion, who had likely overseen dozens of crucifixions, would exclaim as he prayed his last prayer, "*Surely he was the Son of God!*" (Matthew 27:54b).

Let's consider the last three prayers Jesus' uttered - Prayers from the cross. Excruciating prayers.

First Jesus prays **Luke 23:34a CEB**<sup>34</sup> *Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing."*

Jesus prays for deliverance. But not for himself. For those torturing him. He's taking all this rejection, rebellion, sin, hard-heartedness and hate upon himself, and as he bleeds, he bleeds out mercy!

Jesus prayer reminds us of both our need to be forgiven and our need to forgive. And we need both.

The cost of holding onto hurt and hostility is immense. Dr. Harold Keonig, director of the Duke Institute for Spirituality, Theology and Healing speaks of the cost of holding on – that internalized bitterness and hostility is indeed deadly, leading to a reduction in the quality and quantity of our years, medically speaking. But when we engage in the practice and process of forgiveness, while most difficult, is like a fountain of youth, adding to the quality and quantity of our years. In the first of Jesus' last, excruciating prayers, he prays for forgiveness. It is an invitation for us to let go of resentment/hostility.

Jesus second excruciating prayer is also about letting go – letting go of a sense of utter abandonment. **Matthew 27:46 NIV** <sup>46</sup> *About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, <sup>[a]</sup> lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?").<sup>[b]</sup>*

Much has been written about this provocative prayer!

Some see this as a real cry of abandonment of real forsakenness.

That since a holy God cannot abide with sin, and Jesus had taken on the sin of the world, Jesus was literally separated from Abba God at that moment and was express this anguished forsakenness and abandonment.

Others see this as Jesus offering a classic lament from THE Jewish prayer book – Psalm 22: 1.

Still others agree that this is a cry of anguish, but mixed with a message of consolation.

In a rabbinic practice called REMEZ (or hint), a portion of Scripture is quoted to prompt the listener to consider the message of the whole passage.

When we look at Psalm 22 as a whole, it is a remarkable description of what Jesus is going through, written centuries before his crucifixion:

- the taunts – v. 7-8 *All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads.<sup>8</sup> "He trusts in the LORD," they say, "let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him."*
- The pain in his hands and feet – v.16b *a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce<sup>[e]</sup> my hands and my feet.*
- the casting lots for his clothing – v. 18 *They divide my clothes among them; and cast lots for my garment.*
- But then his vindication and the ultimate triumph of God - a triumph that the gentiles will join in.

*v.27 All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him.*

So it seems that rather than just a prayer of abandonment, this is ultimately a prayer that God will vindicate him in the final analysis. "My God" will come through!

And in the times when we feel abandoned, or forsaken, we can remember from Jesus' prayer that even as we express our authentic anguish to God, we can also remember that whatever we are feeling, God has not abandoned us, but is working for our good. God will see us through and we will ultimately prevail with Jesus.

Which leads us to our last excruciating prayer: **Luke 23:46 CEB** <sup>46</sup> *Crying out in a loud voice, Jesus said, "Father, into your hands I entrust my life."<sup>[a]</sup> After he said this, he breathed for the last time.*

Jesus dies in full confidence in God. Entrusting his full life in the care of God.

We like to feel like we are in control. But the reality is we have far less control than we sometimes imagine. This last prayer is an invitation to entrust our lives into God's care. An appropriate first prayer in the morning... and as we go to sleep at night. A prayer for our family ... A prayer for our future... even a prayer for our country and world.

### **Questions to Ponder for accountability in the group:**

As you think about this passage, how can you respond to this Scripture:

1. **Luke 23:34a CEB<sup>34</sup>** *Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing."* On a scale of 1-10, how are you at forgiving others who have caused you pain? What are you learning about forgiveness at this point in your journey?
2. **Matthew 27:46 NIV<sup>46</sup>** *About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out ... "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*. Have you ever felt abandoned or forsaken by God? If so, did you pray during those times? What were those prayers like?
3. **Review Psalm 22.** How does the totality of this Psalm, including the closing section of trust in God's vindication, impact your understanding of Jesus' prayer and your prayer?
4. **Luke 23:46 CEB<sup>46</sup>** *Crying out in a loud voice, Jesus said, "Father, into your hands I entrust my life."<sup>[a]</sup> After he said this, he breathed for the last time.* In a world in which many like to pretend that they have much more control than they actually have, how are you at letting go and entrusting your life into the care of God?

### **Activity for the life of a disciple:**

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMC.
2. Ponder and pray on this Scripture this week: **Luke 23:46 CEB<sup>46</sup>** *Crying out in a loud voice, Jesus said, "Father, into your hands I entrust my life."<sup>[a]</sup> After he said this, he breathed for the last time.*
3. Pray specifically for our country and world as Election Day draws near. Consider coming to Rosenberg Chapel for a time of focused prayer.