

## Sermon – 7th May 2023

When was the last time you prayed?

This is all about prayer – and the strangest prayer you have ever heard.

***Lord let us hear your word – let us hear your plea for us your church to pray at all times and into all circumstances. Amen.***

I wonder if you could you step into Jesus shoes for a moment?

I wonder if you could step into Stephen's shoes for a moment?

They've both got the same shoes.

Both men are being executed according to the law.

Step into their shoes.

You are innocent through and through – the trial has found you guilty and you are facing the death sentence - for a crime you didn't do.

The death you're about to die is execution - normally for the worst of the worst – but you're innocent.

You open your mouth.

You're in Jesus shoes, you're in Stephens shoes - you're innocent, what are you going to say?

Jesus and Stephen say the same thing – it's not what you expect.

Of all the things to say: Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing."

That's your last prayer and with that they crucify Jesus- on a cross and the stone Stephen with stones.

You know, the scriptures, the classic writings, even Hollywood, all portray the Roman army as a well-oiled machine.

They have executed lots of people.

In the gospel accounts execution seems to be almost routine.

These Romans know exactly what they're doing.

Yet Jesus and Stephen seem to understate the whole business – Father forgive them "they don't know what they're doing"!

It's seems like Jesus and Stephen are trying to get the Romans off the hook.

What would we be doing in the same situation?

What would our prayer be?

In Matthew (5:43), Jesus says "*You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.*"

Same thing in Luke (6:28) "*Pray for those who abuse you*" [and hate you]

The command is to pray for your enemy.

And what do they need most: faith in Jesus and forgiveness.

Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing – is the exact prayer they need – a prayer for their salvation.

As Jesus is praying “Father forgive them” – I'm thinking that we expect an instant kind of response – Zap – ‘Roman you are forgiven’.

But if we take time to think – faith think – then we know that's not how it happens.

Forgiveness, is most often a process.

First, it means knowing God's law and God's will – by this we can know we have broken his Laws and his will.

Secondly, it mean repenting of those sins.

Once we know our sins the Holy Spirit leads us to be sorry and turn to Jesus asking for forgiveness.

Lastly, forgiveness is about receiving it – and living a life of thanks.

Father forgive them – is a prayer asking for the process of faith to happen in these executioners.

That's a good prayer.

- “Father, forgive them” shows Jesus' loving, life giving, heart.
- “Father, forgive them” is a prayer of mercy and love like no other.
- “Father forgive them” is a pray for repentance – life giving – life saving repentance.

-

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you”

Funny enough 700 years before Jesus was born, Isaiah who never met Jesus, tells us more about him than anyone else.

Isaiah says: Jesus will take away the sins of those who sin against him and he will pray for them (Isa 53:12)

This is what Jesus is doing today – for his executioners.

Prayer is a bit dodgy isn't it – it seems to work for some and not others.

You know there is a little principle that we should all remember: Jesus and the father have exactly the same will.

In John (5) : *‘Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can only do what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does.*

Perfectly aligned wills.

Father forgive them – for they know not what they do.

That's two wills working as one.

We must seek to pray the will of God.

After this prayer of Jesus we see action – because it is the will of God.

All most instantly a Roman centurion at the foot of the cross – maybe the one who put his spear into Jesus side - after he saw how Jesus died - he said “Surely this man was the Son of God!” (Mark 15:39).

One of the two thieves crucified with Jesus saw that Jesus was the Son of God – was forgiven and promised a place in paradises – today.

Just a bit later a member of the Sanhedrin – Nicodemus from the mob that sentenced Jesus to death – was there ensuring Jesus had a proper burial, and treating his body with the upmost respect.

And about a month later, three thousand, once jeering, sneering Jewish people gave their life to the call of the Holy Spirit and began the Christian Church on earth.

“Father forgive them” is a good prayer.

When we are sorry for the way we live and turn to Jesus, we, too, become an answer to Jesus’ prayer “Father, forgive them.”

There is one more character in this blessing.

He’s quietly in the background.

He’s holding the cloaks of those who stoned Stephen. He’s holding them so they could have a good free shoulder and throw a decent rock.

This man was a murderer.

He killed and persecuted Christians just for something to do.

He once gave himself the title “the chief of sinners”

This man was Saul – he watched on as they murdered/executed Stephen – he had the power to stop them – but he would rather watch.

“Father forgive them” – was the pray that turned Saul the hater of Jesus into Paul the lover of Jesus.

‘Father forgive them’ is a good prayer.

Let it be our prayer today.

It means Father start that good work in my friend, my son, my daughter, my husband.

This prayer was answered long ago – don’t think it will be answered today.

It will be answered today because it is the will of God.

Don’t we often wonder why we don’t get the fancy house, or the fancy car, or the good health we want, when we pray?

Jesus said, ‘ask whatever you want in my name and you’ll receive it’ – but sometimes it just doesn’t happen.

Maybe what we ask for is not according to God’s will?

“Father forgive them”, is perfectly in line with his will – it will be answered.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you”

Can I say it any simpler: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” – it is the will of God.

This all about what to pray and who to pray for.

Maybe, we can ask an even bigger question in the MVLC – do we even pray at all.

Please pray – please join prayer group – we have one.

MVLC has 1 very small prayer group.

Let’s hear Jesus voice – and pray – with others for others.

Make you own group – or let me help you farm a group.

Pray – it is not an idea – It is the will of God.

Talk to me or someone.

Lord teach us to Pray – teach us to be a praying church.

Help us pray for all people – including our enemies.

Amen.