

“Love unto Death”

Psalm 22, Isaiah 52:13-53:12; John 18:1-19:42; Luke 23:34

**Part IX of X in the Sermon Series
“The Journey Back to Love”**

The Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Ahrens, Sr.
Senior Minister

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From the Pulpit

The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
444 East Broad Street, Columbus, OH 43215

Phone: 614.228.1741 Fax: 614.461.1741

Email: home@first-church.org

Website: <http://www.first-church.org>

A meditation delivered by The Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Ahrens, Sr. Minister, The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, Good Friday, April 2, 2021, dedicated to all the men, women and children at our Borders who seeking to find home in our country and always to the glory of God!

“Love unto Death”

Psalm 22, Isaiah 52:13-53:12; John 18:1-19:42; Luke 23:34

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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.

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He committed no crimes. He did nothing wrong. He was without sin. He never should have been executed – just as no one should ever be executed. He came to deliver and save all people. His method was teaching and healing. His way was justice with peace.

He message was Pure Love.

When soldiers and betrayers and the fearful religious establishment came for him, he told his followers to put down their swords. When they beat him and tore his back with whips of nails, he prayed for them. When they mocked him, he absorbed the hatred and derision. When they nailed him to the cross, he cried to his

Father in the midst of his pain. And out of his loneliness and agony, he asked for God to forgive.

Then, as he was stretched out on the crucifying tree, he said to God, *“Father forgive them for they know not what they are doing.”*

Who were “they?” Who was “them?”

Was it Caiaphas and the Jewish leaders?

Was it Herod and Pilate?

Was it Peter and Judas?

Was it all of the other disciples and followers who abandoned him?

Was it the Roman soldiers and centurion who executed him on the lynching tree?

Was it all of the world who did not know him and did not care about his pure love?

Was it you?

Was it me?

“Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.”

Who was the **“them”** that needed forgiveness for their lack of knowing? For their lack of compassion? For their judgment unto death? For their untold abuse and neglect of their own?

Who were they that lacked love?

I believe – It was everyone. Everyone needed forgiveness for what they had done and for what they had left undone.

Then, as now, we hear his cry to US.

“Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.”

Whenever we act like Black lives really don't matter;
or ignore children and families separated and imprisoned,
and caged at our southern border inside our nation;
or when we turn away from neighbors who are Asian-
American and ask as though “no one said anything here;”
or when we abandon our elderly;
or when we turn a blind eye to the execution of yet
another sister or brother in our nation;
or when we forget our single friends living in isolation
and facing tremendous loneliness in the midst of
separation from family and other friends;
or when we fail to hear the weeping of our teens as they
cry out of their emotional or spiritual pain;
or when we fail to hear the real tears and lamentations of
our children who cry themselves to sleep;
or when we miss the anguish of our unemployed or
severely underemployed neighbors and friends;
or when we fail to hear the cries of our poor, or see and
serve hungry and homeless men, women and children on
the front steps of our church and on our streets;
or when we turn a blind eye when police wound and kill
rather than protect and serve;
or when we adopt dogs and cats but leave children
orphaned and abandoned without home and family;
or when we deny the existence of a killer virus and its
deadly effects and side effects on tens of millions;

or when we call an insurrection a peaceful demonstration
and murder an accident;

or when we forget hard working parents who are working
to raise their kids and teach them as their “students”
under the stress and trauma of pandemic times;

or when we blame everyone else for what is ours, and our
behavior;

or when we lack human decency and love...

... I can hear him cry,

“Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.”

**Every one of us still needs forgiveness for all that we have
done and for all that we have not done.**

As our Savior hangs dying on the cross tonight, I ask you to
remember him.

And remember this:

Every word, every step,
every just action, every prayer,
every song, every dance,
every healing, every teaching,
every sigh, every breath,
– even his very last breath –
Was offered in love.

Jesus loved us unto death. Amen.

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