

“Crossed Out” (Cross Roads Week 2)

(Matt. 5:23-24)

- **“Savages”**

- There’s a small, Amazon tribe in Ecuador called *the Auca*. They got this derogatory name, which means “Savage,” from the other tribes around them because they were known for fierce isolation, distrust of outsiders, and violence—some have said *killing was their way of life*. This group gained notoriety in the 1950’s when 5 American missionaries attempted to make contact with them, because of their heart to bring the Gospel to unreached peoples. Sadly, they were killed on the spot with spears. Last week, I talked about one of those missionaries named Jim Elliot, who said, “*He is no fool who gives that which he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.*” (You can learn more in the 2005 movie *The End of the Spear* – **Picture**) It was a tragedy—5 young men killed, leaving behind wives and children. But there’s much more to this story. A few years after, Jim’s widow, Elizabeth returned on a canoe to the shores of the Auca territory. She and other family members of the slain men went to live among the people who had killed their husbands to continue the work they started. In time, their fearless witness of Christ’s love brought this culture of violence to its knees. Some of the very men who killed Jim and his friends became believers in Christ and elders in the first church of the Auca. Today, about 40% of the Auca people have become Christians, and their very culture has been transformed from one of violence to one of grace. All of this unfolded because followers of Jesus chose to forgive their enemies and seek their redemption. Today, we’re talking about *forgiveness*. (*Let’s pray*)

- **Forgiveness**

- It’s the second Sunday of Lent! This is a season of reflection and repentance that prepares us for *resurrection*—Easter is coming! And this Lent we are journeying on the Cross Roads, on the Way of Jesus. The Way of Jesus is a way of *surrender*, it’s a *cross-shaped life*, it’s a way that leads *from death to life*. It’s the *only way* that leads us to *abundant, eternal life*. Today’s Cross Roads is **Crossed Out: Forgiveness**. When you think about it, nothing could be more central to the Gospel than *forgiveness*—it’s what it’s all about! And it’s also one

of the most *difficult* things for us: it's difficult to *accept* forgiveness, it's difficult to *extend* forgiveness ("difficult" is too soft).

- Forgiveness is a central tenant of Jesus' teaching and it's one of the things that sets His followers apart. Listen to what Jesus said about forgiveness: **"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift."** (Matt. 5:23-24) He's saying, *outward demonstrations of faith a spirituality mean nothing if you're not following God's way to live at peace and love your neighbor as yourself.* Later in the Sermon on the Mount He gives us "the Lord's Prayer" where we pray, **"Forgive us our debts"** (or sins, or trespasses) **"as we also have forgiven our debtors,"** and He proceeds to make this radical statement: **"For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."** (Matt. 6:12-14) Wow. That's tough! Later in the Gospel, **"Peter came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?' Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy times seven.'"** (Matt. 18:21-22) It's like He's saying, *Peter, how many times do you think God has forgiven you? Oh, you've lost count? Well that's how many times I want you to forgive others...Love like God loves."*

- **Forgiven**

- Learning to forgive others starts by knowing that you've been forgiven. It takes a *supernatural* level of grace to really forgive someone who's wronged you. If you haven't first of all *received* that grace for yourself, it will be nearly impossible to give it away. It goes against every fiber of our being to pardon an injury, a hurt, a wrong, especially when we don't think they deserve it. But this is how God deals with us—it's the only reason we can be called Christians in the first place!
- Think of how God has forgiven you and me. The Old Testament prophet Isaiah says, **"I, even I, am the one who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more."** (Isa. 43:25) The Apostle Paul said, **"When you were dead in your sins**

and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.” (Col. 2:13-14) Peter

preached in Acts, **“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.” (Acts 3:19)** You can forgive much

when you understand how much you’ve been forgiven. C.S. Lewis said, **“To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you.”**

Only you know the depths of what God has forgiven you. Only God knows how much it cost to forgive. The holy love of God expressed in His radical mercy, His abundant grace, His unthinkable forgiveness of humankind—that is the most transformative force in all the universe. And once you receive it, you’re compelled to share it. And once you share it, more lives get changed.

- **Forgiving**

- Paul, who once persecuted Christians and knew so well the radical depths of God’s mercy, he wrote in Ephesians: **“Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” (Eph. 4:31-32)** ...

- There are so many *powerful* examples of forgiveness and reconciliation when you look through the history of the Church. Elizabeth Elliot reaching the tribe that killed her husband. Saint Patrick going back to evangelize the country that once enslaved him. Martin Luther King Jr. bringing justice through non-violent confrontation and enemy love. And there are every day ordinary stories of grace from believers whose names we’ll never know. I watched YouTube video recently of a father whose wife and child were killed by a drunk driver. Unthinkable suffering. Now, he goes into the prison with his priest every month to share communion with the driver who took his loved ones lives—it’s completely changed both of their lives. I watched this story and I just *wept*. The Love of God expressed in forgiveness can change even the most *ugly* situations into something beautiful for God. The Love of God expressed in forgiveness is *the very power of the Cross of Christ* extended through our lives. There is nothing like it when we let it move us!

you take the first step by praying for that person—before you do anything else, if you can bring yourself to pray for your enemy (or the person you mildly dislike), you can begin to see how much God loves them, and you can even begin to love them. And then, when the time is right, when the situation is right, you forgive—you release them from your bitterness, you let go of the right to get revenge (that doesn't mean you're saying what they did was right, and it doesn't mean you forget, and it doesn't mean you let them hurt you again—it just means you let go of the resentment and you walk free). In some situations, you might not even get to say it to their face, in other situations, you might. Sometimes, you need to talk to a trusted Christian friend, pastor, or counselor. Every situation is different. But every time we choose to love like God, to forgive when it's not deserved, *we slay that dragon*—we conquer evil with good. This is the Way of Jesus, the Cross Roads.

- **“True Humans”**

- Remember the Auca tribe? That was the name they were given by outsiders, “Savages,” because of how violent and dark their culture had become. But they had a different name for themselves within—their real name is *the Waorani*. You know what that means? *True Humans*. Initially, they had given themselves that name out of arrogance and pride—*we're the real people, everyone else is our enemy*. But when Christ came into their culture, and they became a people of grace, that's when they really became *true humans, real people*. This is a picture of Mincaye with Steve Saint. (Picture) Mincaye was 21 years old when he took a spear and joined others in killing the 5 men who came to their shores. Steve Saint is the son of one of those who were killed. Years later, Mincaye became a follower of Jesus. He became an elder in the church of their village, and he traveled the world as an evangelist with Steve.
- Forgiveness changes the world. It disarms and destroys the cycle of hatred and revenge. It slays the fire-breathing dragons that perpetuate fear, hatred, violence, isolation, division, despair. It's the power of the Cross. And that power lives in me and you. Today, as we come to this table, we remember Christ's love and God renews His grace in our lives, so that we can walk these Cross Roads. But before we come to this table of grace—

to *receive* a love and forgiveness that we *did not deserve*, I want us to think about this:
Who do I need to forgive? Where are the bitter roots I need to pull out? How is God calling me to begin a journey of reconciliation? Let's allow the Lord to search our hearts and pray as we come to His Table.