INTRODUCTION: (Gen 22:1-14 as the Scripture Reading)
—Those who think Jesus never preached from a wooden pulpit forget His sermon preached from Peter’s boat... and they forget Calvary.
—The Cross was Christ’s final pulpit where He preached seven last messages in the last 6 hours of His earthly life. They are called “The Seven Words of the Cross.” These will be our focus this Lenten season.
—The 1st “last word” is forgiveness, from Luke 23:34a, Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” HOM.idea.
—His 1st little sermonette from the Cross was actually a prayer, and...

I. This Prayer Revealed the Father’s Mercy
A. It showed Christ’s confidence in the Father during His suffering:
   1. Quiet-times of solitude are conducive for prayer (Jesus enjoyed them, too. BUT this showed us we can pray anytime, anywhere.)
   2. When tempted to question His Father’s will, He trusted Him. [Bad examples from earthly fathers have led some to doubt God the Father.]
   3. Christ’s faith was stretched to the limit on the Cross, but He’d already committed Himself in Gethsemane to “drink this cup”....
B. This prayer showed His confidence that forgiveness was part of the Father’s will (He knew exactly what His suffering was for, so He knew not only that His prayer was heard, but that it would be answered.)
C. It showed His confidence in Scripture. [Jesus surely saw the parallels in the story of Abraham’s test of faith, when Isaac, his 25 y/o son, let his 100 y/o father, with a knife in his hand, tie him up on a sacrificial wood pile!]
   1. Abraham had heard, “your only son... whom you love” — Jesus had heard, “a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love...’”
   2. Abraham had heard, “Father?... but where is the lamb?” — Jesus had heard, “Behold the Lamb of God who take away the sin of the world.”
   3. Isaac carried the wood for the offering — Jesus carried His cross.
   4. After a 3-day journey, Abraham told his servants, “We will worship and... come back to you” — Jesus told us He would rise in 3 days — Luke 9:22. And he said, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.”
TRANS: Jesus knew He was the sacrifice that the angel told Abraham God would provide. He knew why He was fastened to a wooden cross, why the knife that Isaac missed would soon pierce His side, and why, as He told the Jews in John 8:56, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.” Yes, Abraham was glad for Isaac to stay alive! But another Son, the Father’s own, would die and rise 3 days later. Jesus knew His Father’s merciful plan to bring forgiveness to lost humanity, so He prayed with confidence, “Father, forgive them…” On the Cross, Jesus both purchased forgiveness and proclaimed it.

II. This Prayer Revealed the Son’s Ministry
A. Jesus prayed it as He hung between earth & heaven (symbolizing His ministry as Heaven’s Intercessor for earthly humanity)–
1. We need an Intercessor [In StarTrek’s “Insurrection” episode, Picard chides a rebel, Golna, for his plan to destroy his own people, he responds, “Is that the way a Federation officer pleads for his life?” Picard replies, “I’m not pleading for my life; I’m pleading for yours. You can still go home, Golna.”]
   (On the Cross, Jesus was pleading: You can still go Home!)
2. Our need for an Intercessor draws us to the Cross— John 12:32, “But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.”
B. By the Incarnation, God exemplified intercessory prayer (putting into practice as a human what He preaches as God!)
C. The Cross began a new phase of Christ’s intercessory ministry:
1. He now intercedes in Heaven— Heb 7:25-26a. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. Such a high priest meets our need...
2. Jesus still intercedes on Earth through us, the Church, His Body:
   a. We are earthly temples where He continues carrying His Cross.
   b. Our response to the Cross is to be like His: interceding for our persecutors— Mat 5:44-45a. …Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.

CONCLUSION:
[European singer, Henritette Sontag, was slandered by a rival, who even disrupted her concerts. Years later, when this rival went blind, the singer befriended her and saw to her needs. When people asked why such kindness to one who had been so cruel, she said, “She didn’t realize what she was doing.”] It’s not easy to forgive. Forgiveness wasn’t easy for Jesus to purchase. But He showed us how to do it by practicing what He preached, [Poem by an unknown author:]

“Father, forgive them,” Jesus prayed, "They do they know not what," he said;
With heart compassionate he pled
For foes intent his blood to shed.

O heart of Christ! O truth divine,
Was ever love so great as thine?
Though doomed to crucifixion's throes;
Thou didst forgive thy bitter foes.

His back with stinging scourge was torn,
His head was pierced with crown of thorn,
A cross his foes prepared for him,
And yet he pled with God for them!

O Christ, our Advocate in heaven,
Pray thou our sins may be forgiven;
Impart to us thy gentleness, And give us grace our foes to bless.

—God help us to follow our Lord in being always ready to pray that prayer, and to pray it truly, whenever we are hurt by others: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

III. This Prayer Revealed the Spirit’s Mission (“they do not know”)