



Plants for Reflection: Judas Tree

Cercis siliquastrum is commonly known as the **Judas tree**. It is a small deciduous tree from Southern Europe and Western Asia which is noted for its prolific display of deep pink flowers in Spring. There is a story that this was the tree on which Judas Iscariot hanged himself, hence one origin for its common name.

Bible Passage: Luke 23:34 (NRSV*)

Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.'

These words, appearing only in Luke's Gospel, are the first words of Jesus on the cross, as he pleads for forgiveness for his murderers. This event was the climax of a week that had seen Jesus, though innocent, betrayed with a kiss by Judas, one of his disciples; followed by his arrest, ridicule, torture, and execution. To die as a criminal on a cross was a terrible punishment. It was public, cruel, and humiliating. Yet, right at the heart of all the intolerable pain and anguish, there is no cry of resentment, but instead comes the above prayer of forgiveness from Jesus's lips. These words moved one of the two criminals crucified with him, who receives pardon from Jesus. The worst that was done to Jesus became his greatest victory, as on the third day, after the crucifixion and burial, Jesus rose from the dead, paying the price for our redemption.

Reflection: Forgiveness

With his words of forgiveness, Jesus is overcoming the natural feelings of resentment and vengeance we sometimes harbour against those who hurt us. He says to us: 'Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.' (*Luke 6:27*). His plea for forgiveness includes not just his murderers but extends to us all: Jesus pleads forgiveness for us, for the ways in which we have misused God's creation – he pleads forgiveness for the times we regret turning our backs on the oppressed and the marginalized, and for the times when we regret wounding others with careless words and thoughtless actions.

* New Revised Standard Version Bible: Anglicised Edition, © 1989, 1995, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

By the same token, Jesus wants us to forgive those who inflict pain on us and our loved ones. To forgive is to acknowledge and accept that the situation happened, but not that it was all right for it to happen. Forgiveness doesn't exonerate the offender/s, but it is about letting go so that the past doesn't chain and imprison us to the offender/s. We forgive as Christ has forgiven us – it is the gift we give ourselves.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu wrote for *The Forgiveness Project*: “To forgive is not just to be altruistic. It is the best form of self-interest.”

Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for demonstrating your love and care that heals and restores us through the act of forgiveness on the cross.

Lord, it is not easy to forgive those who have wronged us, so we need your forgiving Spirit, giving us strength, courage, and grace to love as you loved, to forgive as you forgave and to serve as you served.

We pray for those who have been victims or have witnessed traumatic events; send others to help them in their journey of healing and recovery.

We pray for the awakening of conscience for the perpetrators of crime who prey upon others, and who don't mind what suffering they cause while gaining advantage for themselves.

Father, take all spite out of our hearts and show us how to win others to you by love. Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

Amen.

For further support and resources

The Forgiveness Project: www.theforgivenessproject.com

Place for Hope: www.placeforhope.org.uk

Family Mediation: www.fammed.co.uk

Mental Wellbeing: www.mind.org.uk