



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. **AMEN!**

In our Gospel reading for today, there is a sentence that I always have trouble wrapping my head around. Verse 29 says, "but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness but is guilty of eternal sin." WOW, did you ever wonder about that one? We are taught from little on that we have such an amazing and wonderful God who forgives the sins of all people. So, what then does this sentence mean. Surely sounds rather contradictory, doesn't it? This morning I would like to try to shed some light on this daunting statement of Jesus.

Last week we talked at length about how Jesus, according to the Pharisees, was breaking the 3rd commandment of honoring the Sabbath and keeping it Holy. This of course, annoyed them tremendously. They were fearful of Jesus power and wanted him gone. They were always on the lookout for a way to send him to his death. As we are aware, Jesus broke many of the Jewish laws and that ultimately led to his death, but it also showed us that the love of God was more important than any rules of religion.

Well, in our society today, we admit that we love rules. Some of us more than others. Can't tell you how many boards or councils I have sat on where I blessed the chairperson with a copy of Robert's Rules of Order. And the more rules you have the easier it is to catch someone breaking them. Right? And so, it was actually easy to discredit Jesus. But the religious leaders turned to other tactics in our reading today and called Jesus the devil, with Beelzebub as his right-hand man. Now they are trying to put a different spin on Jesus other than a law breaker. They said he had the Devil in him. To this Jesus does respond by saying that Satan cannot cast out Satan or he would be divided. This discussion between the Pharisees and Jesus is a warning against Satan's lies and God's ultimate judgment for those who reject the work of the Holy Spirit in the person of Jesus. And that, folks, is the ultimate unforgiveable sin.

If we think a bit deeper, we realize that Jesus cannot be separated from the Holy Spirit. Everything that Jesus does while on earth from miracles to healings, is done through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit flows through Jesus as if He were lifesaving water. To reject Jesus is to reject the

Holy Spirit and to reject the Holy Spirit is to reject Jesus. And if we reject either the Holy Spirit or Jesus, that is unforgivably sinful.

Our text for today contains some answers and maybe some more questions as to who Jesus really is. Some thought that Jesus was a madman. Others said he was a double agent. Still others considered him family. But how does Jesus want to be identified.

An attempt in our text comes from those who should have known Jesus best of all: his mother and siblings. And even they seem confused about who Jesus is and to his sanity since they heard he was not taking time to even eat. Had he gone out of His mind? Then there were also others that our text claimed really knew who Jesus was. They were the folks that had been doing the will of God, those he called brother and sister and mother.

Yes, Jesus is crazy out of his mind, crazy about you and does not want Satan to grab hold of you and so He pushes on to make sure that all can hear and experience his teaching and his love. Through His parables and His miracles and His healings, Jesus wants to come to as many people as possible so they could be saved. Jesus was crazy at work, a true mad man that came to save us all.

The religious leaders saw Jesus cast out demons and thought he was a double agent; the devil in him casting out demons in others. Jesus wanted to clear that misconception up as He certainly was not working for Satan and so he compares himself to a strong man. Jesus, the strong man had come to bind Satan so that he could rescue those who had been held hostage by this prince of evil. Jesus not only cast out demons as he preached the truth of God's Word, but he pointed out man's inability to save himself. But also, his premise being that if we believe this truth, we are no longer hostages to Satan's lies.

And then here comes the warning. Jesus was intense about saving everyone, even those religious leaders who kept rejecting him and so he warns them in our text. Jesus said that if they continued to willfully reject his witness and all the miracles he had done, that they would be guilty of the sin against the Holy Spirit for which there is no hope and no forgiveness.

And that brings us back to our question. I was always taught that all sins are forgivable and forgiven if we just ask and believe. So, what is Jesus talking about here when he said that "whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness but is guilty of an eternal sin."

We are certain that Jesus came to earth to save us from ourselves, from our sins. He died a horrible death on the cross and took those sins with him. His resurrection 3 days later gives us the promise of new and eternal life. That is God's grace shed on us.

Jesus died and paid for every one of our sins. However, we only receive the benefit of that forgiveness when we trust in Jesus. It is the Holy Spirit's job to bring us to such faith. If we keep rejecting the Spirit, we will never come to faith and never benefit from the forgiveness that Jesus won for us all. Make sense? Logical?

Some have used this example to try to make sense of the sin against the Holy Spirit. If a hiker carelessly strays off the trail, getting into a situation he cannot get himself out of, he should be glad when he sees the rescue party arrive to take him to safety. However, if he rebuffs their rescue attempts, there is nothing the rescuers can do but leave the stranded hiker to fend for himself. Lost and alone the foolish hiker could surely perish, not so much because he strayed off the trail, but

because he refused those who had come to rescue him. That is the nature of sin against the Holy Spirit.

A beautiful stained-glass window at our home congregation St Olaf that Rodney and I used to sit beside in worship, was a picture of Jesus holding a lamb as he knocks on a closed door. The door is arched, wooden and another observation is that it does not have a handle. The Holy Spirit knocks on our hearts to be let in. The Spirit will continue to come to us, knocking but will not intercede in our lives without us first opening the door, without us inviting Him in. Make sense?

Our warning in today's Scripture text is to not ignore God's Spirit nor even treat Him with indifference. So don't tell the Holy Spirit to buzz off as if he is a bothersome fly. If we do that, we will lose our faith. And without faith in Jesus, there is no salvation. There is only eternal wrath.

When we allow the Holy Spirit to show us the way to Jesus, we will then become part of the family of God. And Jesus, after all wants us to be his family. Jesus says, "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." Verse 35. Jesus identified himself as family to all who do God's will. God's will is that we repent of our sins and put our faith in Jesus. This faith is what God rewards with the promise of salvation. Jesus considers such people his own flesh and blood. Doing God's will is what makes us a member of Jesus' family.

The mystery then is that once we let the Holy Spirit in and come to know who Jesus is, we then need to discern what really is the will of God for us in this world. And that is not always easy to do. We get pretty set in doing our own thing in this life. Or worse yet we let the evils of the world direct our steps. But that is not always what God's will is for us. God wants us to be saved and come to acknowledge the truth. Our gracious God wants us to be concerned about his kingdom and his righteousness so as to override the devilish things of this world. This does not mean that all will be well in our world. But it does mean that God's will for our lives is that all things will work out for our good. The Holy Spirit of God will walk with us on our journey. He will show us the way, the truth, and the life we received in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Come to know Jesus by allowing God's Holy Spirit into your heart. Open the door. Receive the gift of faith that showers us with forgiveness and the promise of eternal life. Jesus is our Savior and Lord. **AMEN.**