

10/6/21

Mark 3:20-35

A sin is a sin is a sin. I have said this so many times I can't count the number. Yet in today's gospel reading Jesus contradicts my statement. There is one sin that has serious consequences because it cannot be forgiven. Now we all know when we break one of the 10 commandments that we are sinning. Like telling a lie...you may be doing it to protect the person's feelings, or to keep a surprise party a secret, but for the most part, you know when you're lying, and you can ask for forgiveness. Not that that makes lying the right thing to do by any means. And stealing.... You know when you're stealing. A person could have such severe hunger that stealing a loaf of bread would be beyond their ability to resist. Or a person could have such a need, maybe to pay for an addiction, they find a way to steal from their employer. That's called embezzlement. I had a church member who was a dentist. He trusted his office manager with everything. He'd known her for ages, she was a neighbor. She owned a horse farm just down the road, they'd known each other since they were kids. For some reason he decided to have an audit done on his office procedures. He couldn't understand why his manager was giving him grief about it until it was discovered that she was embezzling. Turns out she'd stolen over \$10,000.00 from him over the years she'd worked for him. In December of 2012 it was discovered that a mid-level management employee of Woodruff Arts Center located in Atlanta, GA stole over \$1.4 million dollars by submitting invoices for nonexistent services. The theft, which occurred over a 5 year time period, wasn't discovered until after the employee resigned, even though the company had a top notch audit policy. Stealing is a sin. When we turn away from our sins, when we ask Jesus to keep us from repeating our sin, and ask for forgiveness it will be granted. Just as Jesus told the woman caught in adultery, "Go and sin no more."

Jesus had been healing, preaching, choosing his disciples, and the word had gotten out far and wide that a healer was in their midst. So many people were coming to him that the authorities were getting concerned. Plus, he'd healed on the Sabbath, how could he be a proper Jew when he doesn't follow the law and works on the Sabbath? His family has heard. Is he bringing disgrace upon them by breaking Jewish laws? It's possible since the culture was an honor-shame based culture. Or were they fearful for him because he was, perhaps, demon-possessed? Even Jesus said that Satan would not cast out Satan. What perhaps is the true reason his family came to save Jesus was because the Pharisees were so dead-set against him that his family was afraid that Jesus' life was in danger. Already, at the beginning of his three years in ministry he had already irked the Pharisees whose job it was to keep the Jewish faith free from impurities.

Prior to the families' arrival Jesus has talked about a strong man house, and how a strong man would have to be tied up in order to plunder his property, not that Jesus is planning to steal anything but souls. In my opinion Jesus is saying that he is stronger than the devil, that he is stronger than evil. And that he is not doing the devil's work. Anyone who says he is, is blaspheming the Holy Spirit.

I've been told that if you are concerned that you've committed the unpardonable sin then you probably haven't. It takes giving credit to the devil for what Jesus has done in order to have committed the eternal sin.

When the crowd let's Jesus know that his family is there, we don't see him get all excited and jump up to welcome them. I know that I was very privileged to have a family who enjoyed one

another's company. When I lived in Point Marion, just above Morgantown, WV, I was so very excited when my parent's would come to visit that I would welcome them in and hug them tight. With my sister living in Australia and my younger brother in New Hampshire it was rare for us to get the entire family together, but when we did, we celebrated. My sister has returned to Erie, my brother still lives in New Hampshire and COVID has kept us separated for almost a year. Just last month my siblings and I got together and celebrated, we'll do so again at the end of this month.

Now we know that Jesus didn't end the relationship with his family... Mary was at the cross with him, his brother James was one of the men who spread the gospel after Jesus arose to heaven. So what did he mean by "who are my mother and my brothers?" Was he really rejecting his family? I think not. Yes, he was rejecting being "saved" by them. Jesus realizes they didn't understand his ministry, but no one else really did either. How do you understand a person who has the power to heal, who forgives sin, who talks in parables? He's making a point when he says to those around him, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

There's an old Gaither hymn, Family of God. The chorus starts, "I'm so glad I'm a part of the family of God, it goes on to say "Joint heirs with Jesus as we travel this sod, For I'm part of the family, The Family of God." We can all be a part of this family. Declare, not just declare, but believe Jesus Christ is God's Son and your Savior, love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind, and your neighbor as yourself. That's it.

It sounds simple, but it's not easy. Especially that part about loving your neighbor as yourself; that can get tricky. How do I love my neighbor who just stole over \$10,000.00 from me when I trusted her with my whole business? How do I forgive my wife for walking out on me? My new neighbor's from India. He can't even speak English clearly. Yet he's taken my friend's job at the computer consulting agency. How do I love him? I spoke with a Methodist clergy friend the other day who is angry with the Baptists for stealing members from the church. These are difficult situations in which to love your neighbor. Yet, Jesus said to love your neighbor as yourself. That means you must love yourself too. We are all created in God's image, God doesn't make mistakes. God is love. We love because God first loved us. And as difficult as we can be to love, God still loves us.

So how do you start to love the person you find to be the most unlovable? It begins by prayer. Praying for them. There was a girl I worked with who just didn't like me. We had to work together, but not closely. One day I decided I was going to start praying for her... not for her to change, not for her to like me, but for her to have the best things happen for her. That she would be blessed. It wasn't too long after that that she seemed to be a bit friendlier toward me. And when I was hospitalized, she was the first person from the office to come visit me, the first to walk me down the hallway. Prayer changes things. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself. Pray for those who hurt you. Pray for those who anger you. Pray for yourself that you may have your sins brought to the light and change. There is only one unforgiveable sin, and you most likely haven't committed it. All glory be to God. Amen.