

All Sins are Forgiven the Children of Men

Third Sunday after Pentecost [b]

June 10, 2018

Mark 3:20-35

²⁰ Then [Jesus] went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. ²¹ And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, "He is out of his mind." ²² And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "by the prince of demons he casts out the demons." ²³ And he called them to him and said to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? ²⁴ If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵ And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. ²⁶ And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end. ²⁷ But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house. ²⁸ **"Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, ²⁹ but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"**—³⁰ **for they were saying, "He has an unclean spirit."** ³¹ And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. ³² And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you." ³³ And he answered them, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" ³⁴ And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵ For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother."

In the Name of Jesus.

Jesus is of the Holy Spirit, or he is of the unclean spirit. He speaks by the Holy Spirit, or he speaks by the devil. There's not really any other way.

The scribes and the teachers of the law say he is of the unclean spirit. Mark 3:22:

²² **And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "by the prince of demons he casts out the demons."**

Beelzebul is a name for Satan, the prince of demons. That's where Jesus gets his authority, say the scribes and the teachers of the law.

Earlier John the Baptist had had his say. John is a prophet, and by the authority of what John spoke and what he did, Jesus is of the Holy Spirit. Mark 1:10:

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from Heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

Whether Jesus is speaking by authority of the Holy Spirit or of the unclean spirit can be known not only by what the prophet John said of Jesus and did toward him, but also by what Jesus says—by the words out of his mouth.

For, we know what the unclean spirit wants for us. We know what the demons intend toward us. We know their words.

The devil wants you and me to be held under guilt. The devil wants us to be covered in shame. The devil wants us to be convicted by the law of God in such a way that we can see no way out, no hope; in such a way that we are not at peace, and we see no tomorrow—we have no future.

The devil goes by the name Satan, and we know that his name is simply the Hebrew word meaning, "The Accuser," that is, the one tempting to sin and then, much more, locking the sinner under the guilt of sin.

He is the accuser; he swings the sword of God's holy law; he accuses us constantly in our consciences so that we see no hope or future, and the only out he gives us is the way of us trying to justify ourselves, us trying to conquer the accusation by our own keeping of the law.

And the end of all that is either a gross works-righteousness where we fool ourselves into thinking we are cleaning ourselves up by becoming better people, or a full-blown despair, when we finally realize there's no way out by anything we decide or do.

If Jesus is preaching the law as the way for the sinner to justify self, if he's traveling Galilee to find sinners and condemn them, if Jesus is using the coercion of the law to seduce sinners into saving themselves, then Jesus is, indeed, speaking by the authority of the unclean spirits.

But the *Holy Spirit* is not the accuser.

The Holy Spirit is holy and he makes sinners holy. He brings to the sinner the word of forgiveness. He wants no sinner held by guilt, no sinner covered in shame, but every sinner justified by the word of forgiveness.

The Holy Spirit wants us to be freed by the word of grace in such a way that we see the gift that we are clothed in the righteousness of Christ, that we are reconciled to God and at peace, that we see a tomorrow, a future, where we are not cut-off from life, but that we live with our Father in Heaven for eternity.

If Jesus, then, is speaking by the Holy Spirit, he is proclaiming to the sinner forgiveness, he is going around Galilee giving honor to the despised, he is finding sinners under the coercion of the law and he is speaking to them the freedom of living in grace and knowing that they are justified freely and fully by his word of Gospel.

So the demons, these masters of the accusation, keep us looking at our guilt, and at each other's guilt, in such a way that we have no future. We're trying to deal with the mess around us, we're trying to minimize the condemnation, without any view that we already belong to tomorrow, to the next age prepared for us by the Lord—we already, by the word of Jesus, belong to eternal life.

The word for living like this, for living with no hope, with no confidence of belonging to eternal life, is, *despair*. It's living without a future.

This past week the comedian David Spade lost a loved one to suicide. The death was national news. David Spade made a public statement to help people. He tweeted out, "It's a rough world out there, people, try to hang on."

We don't need to judge David Spade on this. Any of us in the depths of sadness and grieving, might make a statement that is less than we would want. But taking his words, we can see the hopelessness of

our world: “It’s a rough world out there, people, try to hang on.” There is in that statement no tomorrow. No future. The best hope given is to keep your fingernails dug into the side of the cliff, hoping to hang on to dear life for one more day before dropping.

Jesus speaks of a tomorrow. You have a future. Look around and see the sadness, see the pain—we don’t need to deny it—but we don’t belong to it. We belong to life—to life with God. So we hear how Jesus speaks of forgiveness and of tomorrow. He says,

“Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, ²⁹ but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin”

[Mark 3:29]

Our translation has that the one who blasphemes the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness. But the Greek literally says that whoever blasphemes the Holy Spirit does not have forgiveness *into the age*. That is, into the age to come, into eternity. But, says Jesus, he is under eternal judgment, that is, judgment into the age.

In this, Jesus gives us a direction. He is not just talking about today, but his direction is into the age to come. If you blaspheme the Holy Spirit, you do not belong to the age to come, you are judged in eternity.

In saying this, Jesus shows that the forgiveness of sins does not pertain to just today. Not just the here and now. The forgiveness of sins is spoken from the heavenly throne. It belongs to eternity. So when Jesus speaks to you his forgiveness, when he absolves you of your sin, when he gives you his Body and Blood to cleanse you, he is bringing you into the age to come, he is giving you a future, a tomorrow.

We live here and now. We know the sin and the effects of sin in our lives today. But we belong to the age to come, to eternity—we belong to Jesus and his life of the resurrection.

So he sends forth his Holy Spirit to bring to his word of forgiveness, and by that, to make us people of the age to come, of eternity.

So when Jesus speaks of the unpardonable sin of against the Holy Spirit, this is not someone committing a particular sin here on Earth and then finding out that that sin was somehow worse than all the other

sins. It is, rather, a sinner, hearing the Word of Jesus delivered by the Holy Spirit, hearing the word of forgiveness, hearing the justification of the sinner by pure grace—it is the sinner saying to the Holy Spirit, *No, I don't need that. I don't need to be justified by Jesus, just let me do it on my own. I don't need pure grace, I have my own efforts I'm going to look to. I don't need to be cleansed by the blood of Jesus, I'm going to clean up my life by living more like a Christian.*

It's saying to the Holy Spirit, *I don't need to live purely by the word out of the mouth of Jesus to make me holy, I can make progress on that front myself. I don't want to live by the Gospel, I can live by the Law.* And in throwing back at him the Holy Spirit's gift of forgiveness back at him, the sinner has no forgiveness into the age to come, he has no future.

But Jesus gives us a tomorrow. He makes us people of the age to come. He sends forth his Holy Spirit to deliver his words of forgiveness and life. He turns us away from the scribes and the teachers of the law who excel at counting up sins, he rescues us from the demons who are so good pressing the accusation in our consciences, and he gives us the prayer,

If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,

O Lord, who could stand?

But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared.

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits for the Lord,

And in his word I hope.

[Psalm 130:5]

Jesus speaks by the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit brings to us the words and gifts of Jesus. By this, the Holy Spirit is making us holy, even while we are in our unholy flesh. And by this, the Holy Spirit is making us people of the future, of the Lord's age to come, even though all around we see death.

We are not just hanging on. By the word of Jesus, we are clean, and we belong to eternity.

In the Name of Jesus.