

Third Sunday of Pentecost (June 6th)

Mark 3: 20—35

Pastor Arndt

²⁰Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. ²¹When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind." ²²And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, "He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince of demons, he is driving out demons." ²³So Jesus called them and spoke to them in parables: "How can Satan drive out Satan? ²⁴If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand.

²⁶And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. ²⁷In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man's house. ²⁸Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, ²⁹but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin."

³⁰He said this because they were saying, "He has an impure spirit."

³¹Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. ³²A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you."

³³"Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked.

³⁴Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

There is a prayer that we've become accustomed to using when we eat. It comes from Psalm 107 and goes like this, "*Give thanks unto the Lord for He is good. His mercy endures forever.*" Our lesson for today asks if enduring mercy is actually a good thing? Or is God's mercy the work of Satan himself.

Our Gospel lesson for today is a difficult one. At first look it seems to be a mish-mash of random thoughts that are jumbled together. But if we look closely, the text gives us a clue as to how these thoughts fit together. Mark tells us that "*Jesus said this because they were saying 'He has an impure spirit.'*" In other words, Jesus' opponents think that he's doing ministry "*wrong*". They go so far as to say that Jesus' work is impure and straight from the devil.

So, what was all the fuss about?

Crowds of people are flocking to Jesus. The size of the crowds is one thing, but what really seems to be unsettling to some is the *makeup* of the crowds. People with *sickness* and *disease* are coming to Jesus. *Foreigners* are coming to Jesus. *Sinners* are coming to Jesus.

Jesus' family arrives on the scene. They are there to "*take charge of him.*" We don't know exactly what that means, but it is not encouraging to hear that they think Jesus "*has lost his mind*".

The accusation of the Pharisees, however, is what really causes the scene to explode. The Pharisees accuse Jesus of doing the work of Satan. Jesus lashes back at them. *"Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, ²⁹ but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin."* ³⁰ *He said this because they were saying, "He has an impure spirit."*

The tinder box in all of this are these words, *"people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter except..."*

We expect Jesus to say, *"people can be forgiven for all their sins and every slander they utter except... murder."* But that isn't what Jesus says. King David and the Apostle Paul are not proud of the fact that they are murderers, but they do indeed rejoice that God has forgiven them in the blood of Christ.

The unforgiveable sin is not adultery or unfaithfulness. Rahab and Bathsheba are not proud of their sins, but they do rejoice that God allowed them to be a part of Jesus' family tree on earth, as well as part of his family of believers in Heaven.

What then does it mean to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit? What is this unforgiveable sin? To blaspheme the Holy Spirit is to deny the power and ability of the Spirit to give you or your neighbor new life in Christ. It is to *call the truth of the Gospel a lie, and the work of the Holy Spirit the work of Satan*. If we ask, *"who would ever be tempted to do such a thing?"* be careful. We all are tempted to think this way.

I ventured over to the carnival the other day and watched a man try to win a stuffed animal. I know the value of that stuffed animal. I can tell you exactly where to find it at Walmart and exactly how much you'll pay to take it home. The man at the carnival paid more (*a lot more!*) than what the stuffed animal was worth. There were several people watching him and everyone was thinking the same thing... *"It's not worth it... you're wasting your money!"* As the pile of dollars started to grow on the counter, you could sense that some people's sentiment began to change. What first seemed like a *foolish* act began to be viewed as downright *wrong!*

We all have an imaginary line drawn in our moral sand beyond which we think that it's *wrong* to forgive someone. Jesus reveals where his moral line is. He says, *"I have come to drive Satan out of you! Don't deny that this is my work. Don't deny that I have the power and the will to do it! Stop denying my work of grace and believe!"*

Jesus' mother and brothers arrive. But Jesus does something shocking. He looks around at the carnival of sinners that are gathered around him and says, *"Here are my mother and my brothers!"* It is God's will that we believe the good news of the Gospel. Jesus says that anyone who has such a faith is an intimate part of his family... His mother, sister, and brother. When Matthew records this scene in his Gospel, he says that Jesus went so far as to point to individual people. *"You there! You are my brother!"*

This is how we overcome sin and adversity in our lives. God has made us brothers and sisters in Christ! God does not ask us to understand the Gospel. It is beyond understanding. The reason for our forgiveness is always found in God, not in ourselves. God commands us to give thanks to him, for he is good. His mercy endures forever. This is the work of God. This work is good!

-Amen

