

Rev. Beth J. Costlow

2nd Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 10/Proper 5

Mark 3:20-35

June 6, 2021

Prepared for: Lutheran Church of Our Saviour, Greenville SC

- Grace alone. Faith alone. Scripture alone. Christ alone.
 - These are the “solae” or “solas” of the Reformation, identifying the source of salvation.
 - Luther initiated the Reform of the Church with the Ninety-Five Theses.
 - The Church, from Luther’s view, had strayed from proclaiming God’s free gift of grace through faith in Christ, as proclaimed in Scripture.
 - It has become a money-seeking machine, led by greedy and selfish humans.
- Repeat: Humanity is saved by grace, through faith in Christ, as proclaimed in scripture.
 - Eternity, then, is given to us purely as a gift of God’s love, as embodied in the death and resurrection of Jesus.
- It is with his hope that we hear these words from Jesus, “Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin.”
 - Wait! What?!
 - Saved by the gift of grace through faith in Christ, as proclaimed in Scripture.
 - Except for this one sin!
 - What is this sin—blasphemy against the holy spirit—exactly?
- Before I address that, I’m going to say this: Context matters! And, of course, Greek matters.
 - Context matters: The first part. “People will be forgiven for their sins, and whatever blasphemies they utter.”
 - Jesus reminds his listeners—and us—that God’s very nature is forgiveness.
 - First confession of faith: God is love. And as every student who has ever attended Confirmation class with me can tell you, God is incapable of anything but love for you.

- God does not look at you and see sin. God looks at you and sees a beautiful, beloved child!
 - Greek matters, too. It is, of course, the original language of the New Testament. And that brings us to the second part, “Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin.”
 - Note that Jesus doesn’t say that God fails to offer forgiveness. It says that the *blasphemer can’t have forgiveness*.
 - Close your eyes. (Really, close them.) You’re sitting in the dark, right? Of course not. Even with your eyes closed, you’re sitting in a worship space surrounded by both artificial light from the bulbs above you, and the light streaming in through the windows.
 - Denial of that light doesn’t make it less real.
 - So it is with forgiveness.
 - It is abundant. It is there. And denying its reality doesn’t make it less so.
 - At the same time, a human being who fails to see and acknowledge the sin in themselves will also never recognize their need for God’s forgiveness.
 - As with the light, though, forgiveness still surrounds them. They simply can’t grasp it.
- Which brings me to this: Biblical scholars have long said that anyone who worries about whether or not they’ve committed the sin of blaspheming the Holy Spirit cannot possibly be guilty of it.
 - Why? If you were guilty of it, you wouldn’t care if you were guilty of it!
 - Sounds like circular reasoning, doesn’t it?
 - But think about it. As long as we care enough to look for God’s forgiveness, we can’t be guilty of denying the reality of that gift.
- And that brings me to the last thing that matters: The author of this gospel records Jesus’ words in this order for a reason. What he says first is what matters most. It’s what humanity most needs to hear: Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter....”
 - Forgiveness is real. Forgiveness is Jesus.
 - Amen.