

From the Rector's Study, the Rev. Bryce Sangster
Sunday, June 9th, 2024, Third Sunday after Pentecost
1 Samuel 8:4-20, 11:14-15, Psalm 138, 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1, Mark 3:20-35

There seem to be two questions regarding the passage in Mark today. Jesus talking about the unforgivable sin, and whoever does the will of God is family. I am guessing I am not the only one with discomfort around these two issues.

And it gets worse. At the clergy conference recently, and the speaker, Dr. Betty Pries, when talking about sin said that it tends to start with pain, and she talked about loneliness and a lack of feeling of belonging.

If that is the case, how can any sin be unforgivable?

It reminds me of the time I was co-leading a co-ed camp for 11- to 14-year-olds up in the sugar bush as part of the Diocese of Quebec church camp. We were sleeping in tents. I remember one night I heard something in one of the girls' tents and suspected one of the boys was in there. But when I went to the tent, I did not see him, and he was either gone or too well hidden. So, there were no consequences. But I suspect they did not try it again as they had no idea of the punishment if caught.

Maybe there is no unforgivable sin because our sinfulness can never be as great as God's love and mercy.

Luke 18:9-14

The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector

⁹ Jesus also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: ¹⁰ "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.' ¹³ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven but was beating his breast and saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other, for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.

I am wondering if this has to do with accepting forgiveness. A sense of arrogance which gets in the way of forgiveness.

And this follows into the second question: when Jesus says, whoever does the will of my father is family. This feels like conditional love. But again, this time from Matthew 22:14, *Many are called but few are chosen.*

Is this about self selection, and our choice not to belong or be forgiven?

In Corinthians Paul is talking about what is seen is temporal, and what is not seen is eternal. The outer decaying and the inner renewed day by day.

The Hope is that we get wiser as we get older. Or do we? I heard it once said that someone had thirty years experience. Then the statement was modified, rather on year experience repeated thirty times. So, who do we learn from, and do we continue to learn, or do we make assumptions about what we experienced going forward? And thus, are shut off from any new learning.

What does it mean to belong? I am reminded of first Corinthians chapter 12. Paul talking about the different parts of the body and yet all belong to the body. This brings up another thought that what Jesus is saying that those who have too narrow a view about who is in and who is valuable and what is valuable. And trying to limit others. The family is about value and inclusion not condemnation and exclusion.

Then this is about not restricting the work of the Holy Spirit.

Amen

May the Father from whom every family
in earth and heaven receives its name
strengthen you with his Spirit in your inner being,
so that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith;
and the blessing ...