

Third Sunday after Pentecost
Year B/ Proper 5

All Saints' Church
June 10, 2018

Genesis 3:8-15
Psalm 130

II Corinthians 4:13-5:1
Mark 3:20-35

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts,
be acceptable to you O Lord, our Rock and Redeemer.

I think one of the most shocking verses in the Bible, (and by the way, coming from Jesus' lips), is this sentence: "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 eternal sin."

This is Jesus' response to the crowds when they said, "He has an unclean spirit."

I think Jesus is angry. Who wouldn't be? He has just been called the devil (for real). And his family seems pretty complicit- they seemed more worried about what the neighbors think, rather than defending Jesus. And so Jesus defends himself, on his own, and lashes back- zapping the offenders with eternal damnation.

Maybe there's good reason for Jesus' reaction, yet the response seems way out of proportion. Especially, when you think of the way Jesus responds to the thieves while he is on the cross. It just doesn't make much sense, that there are actions that won't be forgiven by God, given who Jesus is for us.

Just this week at the memorial service for Scott Baker we read the passage from Paul's Letter to the Romans, Chapter 8, that says **explicitly nothing** can separate us from the love of God- neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, **shall be able to separate us from the love of God.**

When Scott's nephew was reading this passage, he had to stop many times, so overcome he was. His pauses, his tears, his waiting to gain his composure, helped me to enter into the power of the words. To pray is to be invited to rest and to take in the glory of God's gift of life. I was grateful, that in his pauses, I could rest, and hear and rely on this Scripture in a new way.

We have to always be reminded: God is always present, pursuing us with love and persistence. I think Saint Paul's straightforward promise in Romans, especially if you read it literally, means that we have life eternal with God. All of us. End of story. We are a part of God, and as Jesus reminds us, God cannot be divided, and so when we die, we return to God, back to the very source of our existence. God is not going to lose any of "his parts." That's us! Our saving grace.

Yet, I do think, in our living, we can say NO to God.

We can, by our actions, cut ourselves off from God; put barriers up, turn away, reject any stirrings we might feel, surround ourselves with reasons and situations that support a Spirit-less world. With a door, wide open, we can choose to not walk through it.

How many of us have felt powerless and so very sad when a loved one who is struggling with addiction will not walk through the door of sobriety. Or when someone is caught up in abusing power and refuses to amend his ways and continues to harm, simply because he can. Or when someone is so afraid to risk and explore and discover because she has been too hurt or too shamed, and you see all these talents and gifts just sit and fester.

Or maybe it's you struggling. I know for myself, there have been inviting doors for the need to forgive, but I just couldn't walk through them, not yet. I knew I needed to, and that there was life on the other side, but my NO was too powerful, and I couldn't let go. Maybe this is what is meant by blaspheming against the Holy Spirit. When a NO trumps the beckoning of the Holy Spirit. Prayer sometimes help in these situations, or a good friend, or a healthy community who keep loving you to become your best, deepest self.

I think that is how God speaks to us, through the urgings of the Holy Spirit..... "Come this way and leave the death-blows of your choices and find love and grace and mercy and courage and power. Please come; I will help you, be with you, hold you."

Yet, often we say NO and we know others who have said NO. The problem is if you keep saying NO to these wide open doors, even demonizing them, pretty soon you will have said NO to your one wild and precious life, and isn't that a type of damnation?

Just this week, a young woman called me about the burial service I will be doing for her grandmother in a couple of weeks. As I listened, I could tell that on the other end of the line, she was fraught. I sat down, to slow down and to listen. It became clear- she was afraid I was going to make the burial service into a "church service" by bringing in lots of different readings and prayers. "I am an ardent, passionate, proud and committed atheist."

I said a silent prayer to myself. I slowed down even more. I asked her if she was near her computer and if she could get online. She could. "Search the *Book of Common Prayer*- it's all online." We found the burial service and she began to protest- "too many prayers."

"Please go to page 484 (I have the page # memorized)- the burial service starts there- it's very short, yet very powerful, because we are in the act of making your grandmother's final resting place sacred. It will be a very dignified time that we will share together."

"So you're not going to read extra Scripture."

“I might. What are you worried about?”

“That reading about love... you know the one I mean; it’s read all the time. I’m so tired of hearing it. It’s trite.”

“You mean Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, where faith, hope and love, abide, these three, and the greatest of these is love.”

“That’s it. Please don’t read it.”

I was sighing, (lots of my doors were shutting) but the Spirit spoke through me, “You know, your grandmother would not have wanted that Scripture as well.”

And she laughed, and then we had a wonderful conversation about her grandmother, about life and death and faith and hope and love.

Doors. They are all around us. Often, they become most clear during times of transitions... at burials, birth, weddings, diagnoses, graduations, vigils. The Holy Spirit is beckoning us to walk through them, maybe not in the way we think we should or can, but the invitation is there, and we need each other to find our way and to trust that we will be guided. No one can do this walk alone.

There’s a wonderful painting with a large wooden door painted on Jesus chest with the words, “Open and you will find life.”

And yet there is no doorknob, begging the question, “How do we open the door?”

The sages tell us that the handle is inside, because it is Jesus who opens the door- we just need to keep walking... walk into the fullness of life. Our future eternity will be filled with Fullness of Life (it’s been promised to us)- why not experience something of the fullness of eternal life Now in this short mortal life we have been given and blessed to live. This is what Jesus means when he says “the Kingdom of Heaven is now.”

As St. Paul reminds us, “Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day... Look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen.... What cannot be seen is eternal.”

The Holy Spirit is urging us forward toward our eternity, and with our Yes’s, we gain the opportunity of practicing, experiencing the glimmer of what it might be like.... living into our promise of Eternity in the Now.

AMEN