

Good morning. How are you? Well, if you are a member or friend of Grace...and you were involved in the Farm Fest, Farm Tour, and Country Fair here these past several days...then I am going to take it as at least a minor *miracle*...that any of us...showed up for church this morning! Yesterday was a super big day and we can still understandably be quite tired. It would have been so easy to have slept late, had a leisurely breakfast, and puttered around the house all morning—but then you would have wondered where I was! So thank you for coming out. And if you did not have anything to do with the big events this week--thank you for coming out too.

By the necessity of being true...to the scripture today...this homily will seem very dissonant...at least at first...with these past several big days at Grace. I need to begin with addressing the huge “elephant in the room” of the gospel reading. So I am going to talk first about...“blasphemy against the Holy Spirit”...and then walking our dog...and then the Farm Fest/Farm Tour/Country Fair. I’m sure you can see the connection? :) |

The idea of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is a very serious matter to have to bring up this morning—but there it is in the gospel reading—and I just cannot ignore it. This has been one of the most scary things in the Bible...so scary, in fact, that even *saying* “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit” can feel taboo. The biblical talk about blasphemy is found not only in Mark but also the gospels of Matthew and Luke—so it is not a fringe idea. It has been the focus of considerable attention by Christians for centuries ever since, because it is so serious. Sincere Christians have really wanted to know... where this line is being drawn...beyond which we cross over into mortal and immortal peril. | But, as it turns out, just what constitutes “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit” *is nowhere defined in the Bible*. Isn’t it strange that the most serious potential disruption of our relationship with God...is never defined? Could it be that Jesus’ silence on the matter...is because he thought that it should really be so obvious? And the simple fact that it is not...actually confirms his point? We shall see in just a moment.

Such blasphemy *sounds* like it would be a matter of... *saying something...really bad*. But, really, when you think about it, we have all managed to *say* things that we have come to *regret*...things spoken...in ignorance... anger...or pain. | There is a quote that is attributed to the author Richard North Patterson that goes like this: “No one should be judged by the worst moment of their life.” | Or, I could put it this way: “No one’s whole life...should ever be reduced to...their worst single moments.” I can’t help but believe some kind of similarly wise perspective informed Jesus’ welcome of sinners into his fellowship--and those sinners, by the way, included his closest disciples. So, it seems to me, and to many within a broad stream of Christian tradition, that “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit” must point toward *something much deeper than our worst words and our worst moments*.

There is also the question of just how to translate this saying of Jesus from the Greek. The way it is translated in the New Revised Standard Version is, as you see in your bulletin: “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.”

But it is also quite legitimate that the translation of this saying could be this: “Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; but *whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit has no excuses and is answerable for a transgression in the age to come*.” In other words, it is a serious transgression for which there can be no justification; however, it doesn’t necessarily mean it is unforgivable--and that is, frankly, what I believe is a more accurate wording. [Repeat]

So, here’s what I believe the blasphemy is: The Bible says that *the truth and goodness of God flow through the Holy Spirit into the world*...and *the Spirit is completely unrestricted as to where the Spirit evokes truth and goodness in the world*.

So, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit...*may actually be as straightforward as...our inability to attend to...or our denial of...what is true and good.* It may then be an inability or an unwillingness to acknowledge *that God is wholly true and good.* Or it may be an inability or an unwillingness to acknowledge *what is true and good...wherever it may be found in the world.*

So that can play out in our experience in three ways, for example:

- We can get so fixated on what offends us about *someone else*—their politics, their behavior, their manner—that we can close ourselves off from experiencing what is also true and good in them...from the Holy Spirit.
- Or, we can get so fixated on what offends us about *ourselves*—our worst moments, our chronic faults—that we close ourselves off from what is indeed true and good *within ourselves*...from the Holy Spirit.
- Or, we can get so fixated on what offends us about the *world...and the destructive things that people...and nature do*—that we assume that all those terrible things are transferable to God—and that we then close ourselves off from all that is truly good in God.

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit...is a failure to recognize...that all that is true and good in the world...comes from God...who is wholly true and good. Such truth and goodness should be simple and obvious. The fact that it is not...shows just how dangerous this is...because we are strangely adept at trapping ourselves...within the things that are false and bad...becoming numb to all that is also truly good...in the world...and in God. |

Which brings me to walking the dog. One of the responsibilities Jennifer and I have is to walk our year-old puppy named Sunday. It is in many ways, a functional thing—a little exercise for both dog and human, a little socialization with other dogs, and of course the necessary peeing and pooping (can I say that in church?). But I have had *a revelation about one of the easily unrecognized gifts of walking the dog*, in which the dog effectively *walks me*. | When I am out with Sunday, it makes it possible that I can have an immediate experience of the goodness of God in the world that is always there but easily unnoticed. It is possible, in the words of Jesus, to: “Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these” (Luke 12:27). Because when you are walking a dog, and your dog stops and is sniffing all around you, then you have been given a moment in which *you can stand there...and take a breath...and look up into the trees and the sky...or the flowers and effusive plant life all around...and you can have an immediate contemplative experience...of the palpable and true goodness of God...that is right there...but otherwise lost to our consciousness.* Sunday gives me both an opportunity, but also “cover”, so to speak, so I that can unselfconsciously stand outside in public in a true moment of the refreshing goodness of God. And it is in such a moment like that—as just one example—where the truth and goodness of the Holy Spirit...of God...is honored...and we may be disrupted...in our *captivity* to all the many things which are *untrue and not good*. |

Which then brings me, finally, to the Farm Fest, Farm Tour, and Country Fair. Gosh, it is a huge piece of work! *But we also know...that there is so much which makes it all worth doing...again...not only the money for charity...but what it can do for us and our guests...a restoring and revivification of our community with one another...the visceral experience of such a big wide hospitality.*

This big thing we do together each year...amidst all the many details...is a *precious opportunity to experience...in moments...or in retrospect...what is true...and good...in...and outside...these church walls.*

And it is yet another real taste of all that is...already and always...dependably...true and good...in God.