

# Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

The Second Sunday after Pentecost: June 6, 2021

“The Unforgivable Sin”

Rev. Dr. Lois Williams

Good morning and welcome to a new month. We begin the long season of Pentecost, or what can be liturgically called *Ordinary Time*, or the *Green Season*. This year we are also reading through the Book of Mark, a Gospel that is short, to the point, and also the oldest of the Gospels. Most believe the Gospel of Mark is at the foundation of all the other Gospels.

Today’s Gospel begins our long season with a statement that forgives all sins, except one. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Let me offer a definition at the outset. Blasphemy against the Spirit—the unforgivable sin—is an *ongoing hardening of your heart* against the Holy Spirit who is trying to lead you to repent of sin, believe in Christ, and create a better world. Furthermore, it is an issue of the *heart* that *manifests* in your *words* and *actions*.

And let’s just be clear, when you google “unforgivable sin,” well, let’s just say a lot of people are worried about it. Most of the posts ask, “Can you still do the unforgivable sin today?” The answer, “Yes” you can, but let’s look at our readings today for examples.

In our Old Testament reading, the people of Israel are demanding a king. They are tired of being led by a spiritual leader, a prophet. Instead they prefer a king, as the reading informs us, “just like all the other countries.” This almost sounds like that excuse we all try as teenagers – “but please, everyone else is doing it.”

And there is a very good probability all those other countries were doing it. But what that reading demonstrates is pretty close to that unforgivable sin: blasphemy of the Spirit. Here the Israelites are rejecting their prophets as leaders, but in reality they are actually saying they prefer a human king over the guidance of God and the Spirit.

They are slowly hardening their hearts and minds to a point of no longer connecting to God's plan for them; not trusting that God will guide them; or facing the truth about themselves and their situation. And as this reading tells us, they will pay a king dearly for his imperfect leadership, rather than have a prophet show them the truth when they are not following God's ways.

As for Jesus' family, they are the typical non-believers. They come to take Jesus (their crazy family member) home before he does more embarrassing things in public. In other words, they have somehow hardened their hearts to the obvious miracles and healings Jesus has done through the spirit of God. And Jesus will pay dearly for this – with his all. This time it will be God paying dearly for human imperfect leadership and hearts too hard to let the love in. With Jesus showing us and forgiving us when we are not following God's ways.

Our country right now is divided, and as Jesus states, a house divided cannot stand. People are hardening their hearts to each other as seen by the violence, prejudice, and turning away from the truth. Divisions are in our homes, workplaces, and public squares. We are slowly becoming numb to our imperfect nature; we are slowly watching horror unfold daily on our TV screens either feeling nothing, or that we are unable to do something.

Granted, I don't suspect that anyone at our church (nor would I recommend it) is muscling down some active shooter in a parking lot somewhere. Or even that you

get close enough to film a police response in action. But we can't harden our hearts.

When hearing the stories of those who are causing the violence, if you listen and look closely, you can see a lack of love. You can see in their eyes and in their histories a series of people who instead of opening their hearts, closed or rejected those who eventually burst out violently.

We are called by the sacrifice of Christ to **not** harden our hearts. We are called to see the good: the glass half full, and to act to make that good happen, and fill that glass to overflowing. We are called to continue to love, learn, and apologize when necessary.

We are called to see the Spirit moving in our lives, we are to see what is known as *collateral beauty*. Just as things die, new things spring to life. Just as we see the destruction, we must see the beginning of new birth. Finding the Spirit working will keep us from becoming numb, hard hearted, and indifferent.

It is only from a place of quietness, softness, and compassion that we can make the difference to someone on the edge, someone struggling. It is with the Spirit's guidance that we can move forward making good and safe personal and political decisions.

Several weeks ago, I spoke about the Spirit being our prayer partner. The Spirit is also the mover and shaker and opportunity maker – if we look closely enough. Jesus tells us, yes you can reject the Father, you can even reject the Son, but if you become blind and hardened to the goodness in the world – well, then there is actually nothing left. Nothing to live for.

If you set your life out to deny the goodness in the world, as Jesus would say, "Woe to you." Once again, the issue isn't about a wayward, hateful or God-

dishonoring word in a moment, but about the fundamental state of one's heart before God.

The biblical description of the Holy Spirit, "one convicting individuals of sin", helps us understand why blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is such a grave issue. Blaspheming the Holy Spirit is not simply saying something bad about the Holy Spirit, or about anything else, for that matter, but is a persistent rejection of the work of the Spirit, whose job it is to expose our sin and lead us to repent and create a better life.

When your heart is not hardened and you reflect over your day, it is the Spirit that speaks to you and says, "would Jesus like what you just did? Were you acting like someone who feels loved by God and therefore able to be loving?"

The Spirit helps us love, learn and apologize when necessary. The Spirit helps us maintain our humanity; it humbles us. The Spirit allows us to see God in our lives. Those Old Testament Israelites went down a rough road with their kings. The religious proud of Jesus' day who were bent on stopping God's work in the world are now receiving their judgment. Please notice, they are no longer here, but God's work in the world still is, you are proof.

I challenge you this week to let the Spirit in; to shine light on the part of you that may be heading into hardening. Is it that neighbor, that co-worker, that social program, the pandemic, the violence, the many million things that make us take from, rather than give to and contribute to our families, communities and country?

Pray, repent, let the Spirit in. Love, learn, and apologize when necessary. Accept forgiveness, forgive yourself, and stay far away from the unforgivable sin. ***Amen***