

Rotten Apples!

Genesis 3⁸⁻¹⁵; Psalm 130; 2 Corinthians 4¹³⁻⁵¹; Mark 3^{20-end}

*Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness.
[Mark 3²⁹]*

The story of Jesus turning his back on his mother and brothers could lead to questions about how far we can trust our relationship with him, especially as this is the passage that records him as saying: **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 sin⁹ - for they had said, 'He has an unclean spirit.**

What if he turns his back on us, too? What would that mean for who are and what we hope for?

Yet, we do need to take note that the reading from Genesis is precisely about God turning his back on us:

- ✦ Adam and Eve are in the Garden of Eden just after they have given in to Satan and broken the single rule God gave. The immediate effects were the need to **hide**, the advent of **fear** and an embarrassment at being **naked**.
- ✦ This soon gave way to avoiding personal responsibility and passing the blame: from the man to the woman and from the woman to the Serpent.
- ✦ That led, in our reading, to the snake being cursed and then beyond that to both the man and the woman.

The theological short-hand for this is *The Fall* and it is the break in direct contact between God and his man creation because in braking the one rule that there was they fractured God's trust: we sin and death is the result - Jesus should turn his back on us!

Into this Jesus speaks in the Gospel - setting out the binary nature of faith: you are with Christ or against him (and who you are doesn't make any difference - even his Mother found that out!):

- ✦ The **Scribes** think that Jesus is able to do what he does because he is in partnership with Satan: **He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons**. They have to do that because the only other option is to acknowledge Jesus for who he is - God Incarnate!

- ✦ Jesus points out the flaw in this: **How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come.**
- ✦ Jesus assures us that **people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter** - that is what we need to hold on to.
- ✦ Yet, so many have tortured themselves because he goes on to say: **whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin**. There is no doubt that Jesus is angry, but there has to be a truth here. The simplest (and therefore probably the most likely interpretation of this) I have heard is that this '**blasphemy**' is indifferent towards God. Of living and speaking as if we will never have to answer for ourselves. Of not caring that God exists and certainly not caring about what he thinks about us.
- ✦ Jesus rejection of his human family comes hard on the heels of this and simply makes the point that spiritual priorities trump human and personal preferences or needs.

The Psalmist, as the Psalmist so often does, gives voice to the journey of faith:

- ✦ The experience of crying **out of the depths**, and the awareness that in the presence of God's holiness, **who can stand**, leads to **hope** and **waiting** which gives way to **forgiveness, mercy** and **redemption**.

Then finally, Paul - based on **grace** - dares to look forward:

- ✦ It is the power of the resurrection that raises us and **will bring us into your presence**. **Grace** as we know it from God and experience it in Christ leads to an **increase in thanksgiving to the glory of God**.
- ✦ Paul then focuses us forward - aware that the failings of our human lives mean that we are **wasting away** he reminds us that our hope is in God's future for us. We are being **renewed day by day**; and we are being changed - **our inner nature is being renewed day by day**; the struggles that arise out of the Fall and our own sin is **preparing for us and eternal glory beyond all measure**; and that we look forward to a **building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens**.

So, we must ask, *Is there a sin that cannot be forgiven?* Yes, but, if you are concerned about it, it isn't you. It is for the rotten apples that really don't care what God thinks - who, unlike those who experience grace and hope for heaven, get what they deserve.