

THE MESSAGE for April 3, 2011**John 9: 1-41*****Lead Us... Forgiving the Unforgivable*****The Rev. Dr. R. K. Miller**

Question: Have you ever felt that something in your life was unforgivable? If people knew the whole truth about our lives, they would probably reject us. They would probably kick us out of the church.

In the last church I served Tina and her husband came to see me. Tina was a faithful church leader. People looked up to her as an example of the faith. She lived by grace and mercy and forgiveness, which flowed naturally into the lives of those around her. The problem was, if people knew the truth about her life, if they knew her secret, if they knew about her past, they would have rejected her for sure.

Tina had an abortion when she was a teenager. Years later, now married and ready to start a family; she was convinced that the reason she wasn't able to get pregnant was because God was punishing her. As she told her story to me, I could see the guilt and shame for the "unforgivable" thing she had done in her past. Today, they have two beautiful children together.

Picture living in Jerusalem in Jesus' day. Life was lived by the strict traditions established by the religious leaders. Disease, or illness, or a birth defect, or infertility was seen as evidence of sin, yours or a family member's.

That's the situation we find in our reading for today. Jesus is talking with a man born blind. The man sees his blindness as God's punishment. As do the people around him. He is seen as unforgivable. That was the theological eyesight people used in those days. Some people still see that way today. Let's read the first 12 verses of this story.

(Read John 9:1-12.)

Allow me to summarize the next couple of verse. Then, we'll pick up the story with verses 35-41.

After being healed, the man is brought before the religious leaders – the Pharisees. Throughout the interrogation, the Pharisees focus on one fact and one fact only – Jesus broke the law. He healed this blind man on the Sabbath, which was forbidden in their view of the law. The blind man kept telling them, "I was blind and now I can see. How could a sinner do such a powerful miracle?"

The Pharisees are not satisfied with the man's testimony so they look to his parents for clarity. But they are afraid of being kicked out of the church, kicked out of the synagogue. So they put the spotlight back on their son. He can answer for himself. He's an adult. Ask him. Leave us out of it. His parent's did not support him even through he was telling the truth. Has that ever happened to you?

The Pharisees, driven by pride and unwilling to see who Jesus really is, say to the man, “*You were born entirely in sin, (which by the way we all are) and are you trying to teach us?*” They kick the man out of the church, kicked him out of the synagogue.

We pick up the story in verse 35, where Jesus finds the man.

(Read John 9:35-41.)

I want to shed some light on three points in this story.

Point #1:

No sin is beyond God’s forgiveness except the sin of “blaspheming the Holy Spirit.”

That’s what the Pharisees are doing. They are denying God’s grace and keeping it for themselves. That’s the worst sin. And it causes them to be blind.

For those who believe God’s work of forgiveness is poured out through the cross of Christ. So the choice is ours. We can choose to live in the darkness of guilt and shame and be blind or we can choose to live in light of grace and forgiveness that is ours in Christ Jesus and see.

Growing up Billy’s father saw life through the lens of guilt and shame. His father was unforgiving towards others and felt unforgiven by God making others feel that way too. Billy saw the toll it took on his father and the family. So at a young age he made a commitment to spend his life sharing the good news of God’s grace and forgiveness with others. That boy grew up to be known as Billy Graham the evangelist.

On the cross when Jesus breathed his last breath, he said “It is finished,” which can be translated as “paid in full.” Jesus has paid in full the debt of our sins, all of them – past, present, and future. Believing that changes the way we live. It changes the way we see life and those around us.

Do you believe that you are a forgiven sinner? If so answer, “I believe!”

In Ephesians 2 Paul says “*For by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not the result of works, so that no one may boast.*” Guilt and shame are like cataracts that cloud our vision of God’s grace at work in world.

Jesus heals this blind man and it changed everything – no more guilt, no more shame. For the Pharisees, who thought they could see, were blind to God’s love and grace in their lives and in the lives of others.

Question: How is your eyesight?

Point #2:

God rescues us out of the darkness into the light -- filling us with a joy and peace to worship God alone.

When Jesus meets the man a second time after he has been healed, the man believes in Jesus, saying, "Lord, I believe." And the man worships Jesus with gratitude and joy. It's a beautiful thing to see.

This past December a female humpback whale was swimming just outside the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, and got hopelessly entangled in the fishermen's nets. The only way to help the whale was to dive into the water and cut the netting free. Dangerous as it was, the divers were able to cut the ropes and set the whale free.

What happened next was incredible. The whale swam circles around the divers like a joyous dance of freedom. The whale then came up to each of the divers individually and nudged them, as if to thank them for setting her free. For some, it was the most beautiful thing they had ever seen.

We, too, have become entangled in nets of sin making us hopelessly trapped. Jesus drives into our lives to cut away the netting of sin and set us free. In joyful response we gather regularly in this place for worshipping God with grateful hearts committing our entire lives to the One who opens our eyes so we can see.

Point #3:

Jesus forgives what seems unforgivable.

Jesus is the light of the world making it possible for us to see. Where would we be without the light? We'd be in the dark.

We have a nightlight in the hallway in our house. We depend on that nightlight and I can't sleep without it. It shows the way in the dark. Jesus is our nightlight. He gently and lovingly overcomes the darkness in our lives so we can see God's grace and forgiveness flowing into our lives. Jesus is the light of the world guiding us in the way of peace and joy everlasting.

Question: How might you let the light of Christ shine in you and through you today? May I suggest it begins with a clear vision – seeing ourselves and the people around us as forgiven sinners. Amen.

Let us pray... Lead us, O Lord, to forgive the unforgivable. Amen.