Mark 3:28-29, 33, 35 I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin…Who are my mother and my brothers?...Whoever does the God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.

 As you listened to this reading today, did you catch the gist of the lessons? That’s right there are really two lessons found in this text and both lessons deal with the rejection of Jesus, if you would, what is behind the rejection of Jesus. It has always been a portion of Scripture that I have wrestled with because for many years I just failed to see the point of what was being revealed. But finally, I see the points and the best I can tell you is pay attention! Pay attention so that you are not one of those who find yourself on the outside of that group called “believers.” Our theme for today will be: **THE MEASURE OF FAITH!**

 Now before we go any further we are going to have to understand just what it was that precipitated this whole conversation and what is being taught. Please note that there are two things that converge at the same time to bring to a head this rather important lesson or lessons, depending on your final view. I think two lessons that converge into one fact but it is two separate paths to the very same truth.

 In order to grasp what happened we need to turn to the parallel text that is found in Matthew. In Chapter 12 we find this same lesson but what happens to cause this first part of the lesson is clearly laid out. Let me share with you Matthew 12:22-23. **“Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see. All the people were astonished and said, ‘Could this be the Son of David?’”**

 There is what caused a great deal of this conversation. Immediately, as the Pharisees or as Mark puts it, **“The teachers of the Law”** grasped that people wanted to believe in Jesus or were on the verge of grasping that Jesus was the promised Messiah they spoke up to dissuade people from faith. Their claim, **“He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons.”**

 Please note what they say. Jesus has already been doing miracles for maybe six months at this point. It is the reason that the crowds are so dense and eager to listen. The miracles are of such nature that there is no denying them. They are right in your face and clearly for the follower of God the only conclusion that could be made about Jesus based on the miracles alone is that Jesus must be the Christ, the Son of David, the Savior promised long ago! Yet the Pharisees, the religious leaders, have determined already that they do not want to believe in Jesus! They do not want to give up their religion and the positions of authority and honor they have carved out for themselves in this religion. Needless to say, if you understand what they have been teaching and emphasizing about God and religion, you would grasp that centuries ago the Jewish people abandoned the truth of God and God’s religion.

 So they are confronted with a problem. Here is this guy who is doing miracles just like their Scripture said he would and they refuse to believe! How do you get the people to also refuse to believe? You accuse Jesus of using the power of Satan! You accuse Jesus of being in line with the Prince of Demons. You twist the obvious truth around, you refuse the obvious truth because after all, you are a religious leader, a religious person and you know, you just know in your heart that you are right no matter what!

 You, of course, see how Jesus answered them. What Jesus says makes perfect sense and logic. Listen again to his words. **“How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. In fact, no one can enter a strong man’s house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can rob his house.”**

 I think those words pretty well stand for themselves. For that matter, history has clearly shown that these words are true in any kingdom. You cannot oppose yourself and stand. But did you catch the most important part of what Jesus said? That part about the strong man! Jesus had just healed a person who was possessed by, owned by Satan and Jesus healed him, stole that soul right out of Satan’s hand. Is Satan really a strong man? Does it not actually indicate that already the process that has brought about the defeat of Satan is in play? Jesus has already hindered and limited Satan just by his presence in this world. Jesus by his miracles and teaching has already shown that Satan is soon to be at a total end. Jesus is already even at this early stage of his ministry, more powerful and knowledgeable than Satan himself. Satan is on the ropes and is soon to go down!

 And that’s when Jesus brings in the lesson on blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Let me run this down for you quickly. The Holy Spirit is the one who calls to faith, keeps in the faith and strengthens our faith. That is His job and always has been. The Holy Spirit is the one who reveals the will of God by giving the revelation of God, a revelation or Word that is based on and revolves around Jesus and his power of salvation. To blaspheme the Holy Spirit is to reject his call to faith or to reject his truthful and life-saving revelation of Jesus and the redemption Jesus brings.

Please note this text says that **“all other sins and blasphemes of men will be forgiven.”** You can wrestle with faith, you can be weak in faith, you can question and seek answers for your faith and those things can be and will be forgiven. I even believe it is possible for you get sucked into the horrors of living sin, not because you have rejected faith but because you are weak and lacking in faith and you can still be forgiven. But once you decide you are wiser, more insightful and more powerful than God or his revelation you will have a problem. Once you determine that you will be god and that God will have to yield to your wisdom and knowledge, so that you refuse to believe the clear and plain teaching of God’s Word, you are guilty of an eternal sin and you will go to hell. That’s where the Pharisees and religious leaders, many of them, were at. They rejected that Jesus clearly fulfilled Scripture. They rejected that Jesus clearly explained and applied Scripture. They had the Holy Spirit before them showing them that Jesus was the Christ the Son of God through these awesome miracles, hundreds of thousands of miracles, and through the clear words of their Old Testament and they refused to believe! They refused the truth of God. They refused to yield their sin sick souls to the power and wonder of God. They would rather believe a lie, make up lies and reject Jesus than believe the power and marvel of God right in front of them! They have refused and rejected God and His faith! That is the eternal sin!

In today’s world I fear many people do this very same thing. They might even be religious leaders, seem like pious people, or good people and still they have a problem. They reject the truth of God. They reject the Bible as God’s Word. They reject clear and purposeful teachings because it is not what they want. They laugh and scoff at those who trust and put their faith in Jesus and will even declare that you are deluded and full of the lies of what the world knows is evil! Trust me, Scripture says a lot about them. It warns us constantly about the false teachers who though they do miracle and wonders in the name of Jesus, Jesus finally says of them, **“I never knew you!”** (Mtt. 7:15-23). Do not be them! Do not fool yourself into thinking you know better than God!

And clearly this lesson is given so that we can take warning for ourselves. What I find fascinating is that another instance occurs and the same kind of warning is sounded. As this conversation with the Pharisees is ending here comes Jesus’ mother and brothers, themselves about to enter into the foolishness of not trusting God and what they know.

Now, this is Mary, the mother of Jesus. She knows about the angel and the virgin birth of Jesus. She has a long history of having the fact that her Son is the Christ of God thrown in her face. Not to mention that she has now spent some 30 years living with this perfect Son and seeing first hand his absolute perfection and sinlessness. But here comes Mary with her other children and they have decided that they need to rescue Jesus, kind of save him from himself. Our opening verses of this section said it this way, **“When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, ‘He is out of his mind.’”**

I have to believe that somehow, the brothers and sisters of Jesus were the ones who brought this about. Mary, I hope, was just along because she was temporarily blinded by the kids and what they were saying. They were concerned with Jesus. He didn’t have time to eat. He had crowds upon crowds of people following him. He was doing miracle after miracle. Clearly their older brother has lost it! They need to take charge and get him some help or do they want to take charge so they can use Him for their benefit and purpose? Interesting thought isn’t it? And by the way, just so you know, Scripture makes it clear that until after the resurrection, the siblings of Jesus do not believe in Him! Let that sink in! They do not believe in Him. No wonder they are here! And yet Jesus uses this curious moment to teach. To teach us a clear and wonderful truth.

Jesus doesn’t care about your human ancestry! If you want to be of the family of Jesus he tells you exactly how to do that. He says, **“Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.”** You don’t get to do what you want. You don’t get to see things and be what you want. To be of the family of Jesus (even as his earthly family is standing there) is to do the will of God!

Now, what does that mean? As Lutherans we believe the only way to know the will of God is the revealed will in His written word. Can you grasp the heart and mind of God? Can you know what the all-powerful and all-knowing God knows? I cannot know the will of God apart from God’s Holy and revealed Word. That’s why God gave us his Word. That’s what the work of the Holy Spirit is all about, that we might grasp that God’s Word is God’s revealed will and that will is revealed, fulfilled and upheld in Jesus! Jesus is true God. Jesus and the Father are one! To know Jesus is to know the Father and the only way to come to the Father is through Jesus. When you are talking the will of God the absolute best that we can do is hear and believe God’s Word because it is the revelation of God’s will.

There are those who say, “The Holy Spirit will show me God’s will.” But I ask, “How come you keep doing what is contrary to God?” A once famous preacher declared it was God’s will to build a hospital and God told him the cure for cancer would be found if it happened. He lied. People declare it is God’s will that you be healed and then you die! That’s a lie. Or they tell us, “It was God’s will that this or that has happened.” Really? Did God tell you that or are you just assuming you know what God’s will is? Or people buy something or do something and declare it God’s will. But how do you know? Because you have a feeling? You sense it is true? God talked to you about it? Can you honestly, honestly tell me that it absolutely wasn’t Satan manipulating you? God warns us Satan can disguise himself as an angel of light. How do you know you weren’t fooled?

That’s why it is wisest to simply say, “God’s Word reveals God’s will.” If it is in keeping with the Word of God, Old or New Testament, it is then God’s will. Jesus says you need to do “God’s will” to be of his family. And here is God’s will in a nutshell: Believe in Jesus as the Savior, the Son of God who gave his life for you, rose from the dead for you and ascended into heaven for you. Believe in Jesus and by the power of His spirit working in you put aside sinful ways and desires, repent of sin, struggle against sin, and keep before yourself the wonder and marvel of forgiveness of sins. It is all wrapped up in Jesus. This family, even Mary, though they knew better, decided that this Jesus was off. Is that how you look at Jesus?

Don’t run around thinking or saying that Jesus is crazy, that this Jesus stuff is just way off the wall. Because if you do, then you don’t know and believe in Jesus. Trust Jesus and His Word!

There you have it, two lessons on faith. Well, really a lesson on faith and two ways to avoid destroying your faith. Trust Jesus. Trust who he is and what He has done. Amen.