

**Sermon Notes from CMJ**  
Second Sunday after Pentecost – Year B

**RCL & ACNA Readings** – Genesis 3:8-15; Psalm 130; 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1; Mark 3:20-35

**Introduction.** Both believers and non-believers can sometimes be confused by the Holy Spirit, thinking that he is some kind of undefined cosmic force that is coming to give spiritual gifts to the Church. The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal force handing out blessings and rewards. Rather he is a person, a full participant in the Godhead. The Holy Spirit is an agent of salvation, bringing God to us. As Paul writes, “He has saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5).

**Common Theme.** The relationship that we have with God is intimate and deeply personal. How so? We have the Spirit of God within us, and you cannot get more intimate than that. Our relationship through the Spirit is so personal that, as we read in today’s Gospel, it is possible to offend and blaspheme against him.

**Genesis 3:8-15.** We were created to be in a relationship. God said it was not good for man to be alone, so he created woman. Not only were humans to be in relationship with each other, but God himself delighted to leave heaven and come to earth to participate in that relationship. Unfortunately, sin mars the connection with God. Despite knowing that Adam had sinned, God still left heaven and walked in the garden, wanting to speak with him, still desiring that connection. Adam and Eve sought to hide from the Lord; Adam’s excuse was that he was naked, notwithstanding the fig leaves he had used to cover himself. Genesis 2:25 informs us that Adam and Eve were naked and without shame. In Hebrew, there is a subtle difference between the word “naked” as used by Adam in Genesis 3:10 versus that in 2:25. The letter *yod* has been introduced into the word for “naked,” turning עָרוֹם from Genesis 2 into עִירֹם in Genesis 3, implying a spiritual nakedness. They had originally been naked and without embarrassment; now they were another kind of naked even though they were actually wearing fig leaf clothing. Their nakedness was deeper and more personal and led to shame and hiding from God. Sin makes us afraid of God’s presence and diminishes the relationship between earth and heaven.

**Psalm 130.** This psalm is one of the Songs of Ascent (Psalms 120-134) that pilgrims would sing as they journeyed towards Jerusalem to worship God in the Temple. It is a petition from the perspective of a sinner, who acknowledges their sin, yet knows the Lord continues to hear. What a comforting thought.

Sin drives us from the presence of God, as verse 3 says. Just like Adam, the immediate reaction of the sinner is to duck and hide from God. Sin impairs the relationship with the Lord, however, that is not the end of the story. There is always forgiveness with God, which the psalmist says produces fear. Not that we become afraid of God, rather we become afraid of sin, noting how it damages the affinity we have with the Lord. The psalm reminds us of the hope we have, of a restored and renewed relationship through the full redemption of God.

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**2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1.** Spiritual gifts are great! Paul has discussed them in his previous letter to the Corinthians. Here, though, Paul is reflecting on the paradox of the believer’s earthly journey, that—spiritual gifts aside—the eternal Holy Spirit resides in mortal flesh.

Mortality is an existential problem for an atheist. A finite universe devoid of a Creator brings with it an absence of reason or meaning. The Greek philosophers called it the “threat of non-existence” and invented a “noble lie” to convince themselves that life without God had some meaning. We, however, believe in the infinite God. Our human bodies are a transitory vessel for the immortal Spirit as we journey towards an eternal body. The Holy Spirit we possess is the same Spirit that filled the Messiah and raised him from death. Faith is more than simply knowing this to be true, for that would actually be Gnosticism. Knowing about God is not the same as having a relationship with him.

Paul says in verse 14 that the Spirit “will raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence.” To whom are we being presented and for what purpose? We are presented to God the Father, who has never ceased from desiring to repair the broken relationship with his creation. The Spirit will have an eternal dwelling in our renewed bodies. We will have a renewed and restored relationship with God.

**Mark 3:20-35.** Jesus did not set out to win a popularity contest, though his ministry did indeed become quite popular. It became so popular that Jesus and his disciples did not have time to take a ministry break and refresh themselves. It appears this prompted an intervention from some family members. Jesus had left a respectable building trade to become an itinerant preacher. Perhaps they assumed that his rising popularity would bring celebrity status that might cause dangerous political or social tension. Jesus already had challenged the religious leaders about healing on the Sabbath. He might instigate all kinds of discord. They reasoned that Jesus was now “out of his mind.”

Concurrently, Jesus was also challenged by the temple leadership from Jerusalem. They completely misunderstood the ministry of Jesus and launched into a personal attack calling into question his source of power. *Baal Zevuv*, Lord of the Fly, was a Second Temple Period name for Satan. Flies are notoriously associated with death, carrion and decay. God is life and in him is no death. Satan, as the antithesis of God and life, became known as the lord of death, the lord of the fly. Some accused Jesus of taking his power not from heaven but rather from the agent of death and decay.

In rebuking this accusation Jesus warned the Jewish leaders about the unforgivable sin, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit! This blasphemy is extremely serious, for Jesus says that the person who does this “never has forgiveness, being guilty of an eternal sin.” Most of us have probably wondered at some point, “What exactly is this blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, and have I mistakenly done it?” To answer that question, we should consider the ministry and function of the Holy Spirit. Jesus says the Spirit will convict the world of sin, lead us into all truth and testify about Jesus. Paul says in Ephesians 4 that the Spirit will bring all into unity, and that involves a restored relationship with God. Perhaps we

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should look at blaspheming the Spirit in the context of relationship. Salvation includes the restoration of a loving eternal relationship with the Father. Perhaps it is not that the sin of blasphemy is “too big” for God’s forgiveness but rather that in a broken relationship there is no desire in the sinner to ask for or to receive forgiveness at all. That is a sad state for anyone to be in, to have an attitude that does not care for God’s forgiveness nor care to know God at all. Unfortunately, we probably all know people, friends, and family who possess this attitude. Let's pray for them. It is urgent!

**About the author.** The Rev. Aaron Eime is the deacon at Christ Church Jerusalem and teacher for CMJ Israel. Aaron studied in the master’s program at Hebrew University with a focus on early Jewish and Christian interpretation of the Bible. He also studied psychology and sociology at Queensland University in Australia. Aaron is a dedicated Bible teacher exploring the Hebraic roots of the Christian faith. He reads Aramaic and ancient Greek and is fluent in German and Hebrew. He has taught internationally, including in Europe, North America, Hong Kong, and China. He lives in Jerusalem with his wife and three children.