

## When All Things Seem Against Us

- ✠ Recognize the real enemy. (vv.20-30)
- ✠ Willingly seek God's gracious will. (vv.31-35)

In the name of Jesus, our Savior and our brother, dear family of God:

It was Oswald Allen's famous hymn, *Today Your Mercy Calls Us*, that came to mind when I first read this text from last week's Gospel Lesson. Specifically the last few lines in our hymnal:

*When all things seem against us To drive us to despair,  
We know one gate is open, One ear will hear our prayer. (CW 339)*

What is it that keeps you from approaching God? Are you afraid the gate to His heart will be closed? Have you committed some sin you fear is unforgiveable? Are we busy blaming everyone around us for our troubles, maybe even God Himself – like Adam in the Garden when the LORD God came calling him and Eve to repentance? God does put us into some impossible situations **When All Things Seem Against Us**, but not “to drive us to despair.” Preaching repentance to Job in the Bible's oldest book of suffering, the young man Elihu said: “[God] is wooing you from the jaws of distress to a spacious place free from restriction, to the comfort of your table laden with choice food.” (36:16 NIV84) That “spacious place” and “choice food laden table” is a beautiful way to picture God's Word and sacraments. These throw open the confines of our guilt and free us from despair. Jesus helps us first to...

### ✠ Recognize the real enemy. (vv.20-30)

There's so much comfort here in the fact that Jesus also had times **When All Things Seemed Against Him**. You might think it would be great to be so popular, but the house was so crowded “*that he and his disciples were not even able to eat.*” Maybe you'd think at least His family could be proud of Him, but Mark reports that Jesus' mother and brothers were coming to take Him away, *for they said, “He's out of his mind.”* Could powerful miracles convince everyone that Jesus is God? Jesus had already been busy healing many, including a man with leprosy and a paralytic. Demons were submitting to Jesus, not by dramatic exorcisms, but by the power of His Word. And what did Jesus get for all those miracles? More popularity with people who only wanted Him for a military leader against the Roman invaders. More and more hard hearted hatred from Jewish religious leaders claiming, “*He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons.*” They were plotting to kill Jesus!

All these groups – His disciples, the crowds, Jesus' family, the religious leaders – all had something in common. Their distorted mirror can drive us to despair. When you children feel as if no one likes you, if young people feel hopeless because they've lost in love, if husband and wife are so angry they can't enjoy each other – your heart is aimed at the wrong target. **Recognize the real enemy.** A perfect marriage only gives fleeting joy. Someone loving you back cannot bring you back to God. Friends and family can separate you from God. And there is one **enemy** who wants it that way.

**Recognize the real enemy.** Listen to Jesus: “*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 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.*” He said this because they were saying, “*He has an evil spirit.*”

Satan wants to divide our hearts between God, friends and family to separate us from God. Satan wants us to despair, even to think we committed the unforgiveable sin which Jesus warns about here. But if you fear the sin against the Holy Spirit, you have not committed it because then you wouldn't care. Elihu also said to Job: ***“God does all these things to a man— twice, even three times— to turn back his soul from the pit, that the light of life may shine on him.”*** (33:29f) Jesus told the *Parable of the Prodigal Son* to show us the forgiving Father who always wants us back. (Luke 15:11-27) If you even desire a right relationship with God, it proves God is working in your heart. The Holy Spirit says through Paul: ***“It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”*** (Philippians 2:13 NIV84)

**Recognize the real enemy.** Jesus died for you. As Oswald Allen's first verse says, *Today your mercy calls us To wash away our sin. However great our trespass, Whatever we have been, However long from mercy Our hearts have turned away, Your precious blood can wash us And make us clean today.* (CW 339:1) Trust Jesus' blood for full and free forgiveness. Come back to our forgiving Father....

### ✠ Willingly seek God's gracious will. (vv.31-35)

“Perception is your reality.” So say the psychics. “...decide now to be in charge of your own perception of reality. Because if you don't, there are plenty of folks whose sole purpose in life is to craft that perception for you. Do you trust them to have your best interest in mind...?”<sup>1</sup>

For instance, one morning I saw something in the tall marsh grass behind our home in Lino Lakes. Looking closer, it was a woman swinging her arm back and forth as if casting seed. But why? Then I noticed the cross on her safety vest worn by county workers. Then a helicopter flew overhead. They were on the same team, spreading pellets of biodegradable corn treated to prevent mosquito larvae from maturing. Perception said she was a “mosquito maid.” But would that be her reality, psychic wonders?

You can trust God to have your best interest in mind. Jesus proves it. But unless you see the cross on His uniform, you'll think He's lost in a field – a nuisance at best, an ally of Satan at worst. Even if you were His biological family, you'd ignore His hard working miracles and figure He's out of His mind.

***“Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, “Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.” Did Jesus run right out to His mother Mary? No, He taught us all a lesson. “Who are my mother and my brothers?” he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.”***

At first glance, you might think Jesus is commanding good works to get in good with God. But Jesus is not contradicting what His Apostle Paul says in Galatians, ***“Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, ‘The righteous will live by faith.’”*** (3:11 NIV84) The same Holy Spirit also inspired John to explain what it means to ***“do the will of God.”*** In Jesus' *Bread of Life Discourse* He says, ***“The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”*** (John 6:29) Faith comes first, then the fruits of faith follow, for ***“without faith it is impossible to please God.”*** (Hebrews 11:6 NIV84)

Everything would seem against Jesus' family too until they could see His cross in the light of Easter's empty tomb. Old man Simeon had said something very strange to Mary in the temple with the baby Jesus: ***“A sword will pierce your own soul too.”*** (Luke 2:35 NIV84) A sword certainly pierced her heart when Jesus hung on the cross. But when He rose again? When we see Jesus rise again with the eyes of faith? Then we realize, ***“If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”*** (Romans 8:31f NIV84) Jesus delivers from doubt and despair. Today His mercy calls us to wash away our sins! Today we come in repentant faith, trusting His infinite kindness and His everlasting love. Amen.

<sup>1</sup> Tony D. Clark at <http://www.lifehack.org/articles/lifehack/your-perception-is-your-reality.html> .