



Reflection for September 8

What Could That Possibly Mean?

The Matthew 22:40 Test

By Kate Croskery Jones



Clergy in the North East District often gather on Wednesdays via Zoom for a time of prayer. Typically, we use Morning Prayer and Praise, # 851 in the United Methodist Hymnal and a scripture lesson from the [Daily Lectionary](#).

Last week, our focus fell on these words from the Daily Lectionary:

Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come (Matt 12:32).

Several clergy colleagues confessed that they were baffled by these words. It would be easy to skip over them as there are certainly other passages that one can use to both hear and proclaim God's Word in these challenging days. Yes, even clergy sometimes struggle with Scripture!

When I was serving a local church, I looked upon the challenging passages as an invitation to dive deeper into the Word and preach on the very words that challenged me most. When we skip over the most difficult passages, it denigrates our faith. I will not even pretend that there are not passages more important and more accessible than Matt 12:32. Even Jesus acknowledged that there is a greatest commandment (Matt 22:37).

In Matt 22:40 Jesus instructs us that all the laws and all the prophets (all other scripture) must be interpreted through a lens of the most important scripture, the commandments of loving God and loving neighbor (other humans). So, I asked myself how should I understand Matt 12:32? I start with the Matt 22:40 test: What does this passage teach me today about loving God and loving neighbor? Beyond the "Matt 22:40 test," my usual techniques are prayer, reflection, reading commentaries, talking with colleagues and the shortcut better than Google, is to call my Dad.

The first part of this passage seems straightforward. Even in his humanity, Jesus forgives (and hence so should we). The more challenging words in the passage are that speaking against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. It does seem that to reject the Holy Spirit requires knowing the Holy Spirit and rejecting the Gospel, God's love, and mercy. While probably not the overt sin of our regular readers of this daily devotion, we may reject the gentle nudging of the Spirit. This passage is an invitation to pay attention! This passage draws me to the Prayer of the Holy Spirit, which is a prayer I learned on my [Walk to Emmaus](#). Please pray with me:

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth Your Spirit and we shall be created and you shall

renew the face of the earth. O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy your consolations. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

[View previous reflections.](#)

May this devotion provide you with a moment of faithful reflection and care. You are involved in ministries of justice and witness, in ministries of standing up and standing with people working to create better systems and communities, in ministries of learning and searching and researching to become more aware and awakened, more technologically savvy and proficient, more virtually and personally present in your churches and communities and world. Each of us who serve as members of your Wisconsin Cabinet write these devotions in grateful prayer for you – for sustenance and buoyancy, for strength and courage, for safety and just actions, and for faith and love to be full and fulfilled in your daily lives. God’s grace and blessings, God’s challenge and healthy discomfort, God’s Spirit and energy be with you, in the hope Christ offers us all.

[Forward this email](#)

[View in browser](#)

huxtable@mhtc.net is receiving this email from Wisconsin Conference of The UMC because you have an existing relationship with us. To ensure that you continue to receive emails from us, add mediacontact@wisconsinumc.org to your address book or safe sender list.

[To unsubscribe or manage mailings, click here](#)