

Wesley United Methodist Church

October 8, 2017

“Rejected.”

Matthew 21:33-46

Have you ever been rejected? It hurts, doesn't it? There is no pain more familiar to many of us than the pain of rejection. We remember those terrible younger years when searching for our identity, and acceptance by our peers was so important.

There was a comedian who was sharing his attempts to land a date during his teen years. He said, “I never was very good at this romance thing. I remember my teenage years. We used to play spin the bottle. The way we played it was that a girl would spin the bottle and if the bottle stopped on you, the girl could either kiss you or give you a quarter. By the time I was fifteen, I had enough quarters to buy my first car.” He said, “I remember my first date. I wanted to play it safe, so I asked a rather plain girl out, I didn't want her to say ‘no.’ “I got ready to kiss her good night and she took off her glasses. I was startled. I said, ‘Without your glasses, you're beautiful.’ She said, ‘Without my glasses, you aren't too bad either.’ He continued, “I'm not a quitter, though. I finally asked the most popular girl in our school out. And, you know, she didn't say no at all. She said, ‘You've gotta be kidding.’”

I don't want you to raise your hand if you've ever been there. No use adding insult to injury. Rejection hurts! Whether it's being rejected by the opposite sex, or being the last one chosen for an honor, a ball team, homecoming queen, most of us know how it feels to be on the outside looking in. It may help us to know that almost everyone is rejected sooner or later.

Jesus knew what it was to be rejected. Misunderstood by his own family, cast out by his own townspeople, crucified by his own nation and particularly by the leaders of the religion in which he was nurtured, he knew what it was to be on the outside looking in.

Read verses 33-42, Jesus said to the chief priests and the Pharisees, “Have you never read in the scriptures: ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone...’” Of course, the chief priests and the Pharisees had read it. It's in the Book of Psalms, 118:22. But here's what disturbed them. They not only knew the verse, they knew that he was talking about them. And they began immediately to plot how they could get rid of him.

Simon Peter quoted these same words to the rulers and the elders in Acts 4:11. Later Peter would cite those words again in his epistle: I Peter 2:7, “Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the corner stone...’” What an important message this is for us. Because he knows what it is to be rejected, he can help us with our feelings of hurt and despair.

How do we deal with feelings of rejection? I will suggest that when we're rejected, we do not give up. We don't drop out of the race. We don't crawl off and hide under a rock. We remember the words of Paul who also knew what it was to be rejected. Still he wrote, “One thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:13-14) It is so easy to allow rejection to defeat us.

There is a remarkable story about a young African-American woman from Jamaica who felt a deep connection to these verses about Christ's rejection. Here is her testimony: “I am the second child of my mother and when she gave birth to me, she decided that she didn't want me, so just like Moses was placed in a basket and sent down a river, I was placed under a plum tree in front of my father's house. A lady was passing by and told my paternal grandmother that I was outside under the tree. My father came and got me and his house was my home for 22 years. I grew up with him and my grandmother.

“Fast-forward 24 years later. By this time I was a university graduate with a second degree, the Chief Financial Officer of a major company and a well-known Christian woman recognized for her philanthropy. I was doing pretty well despite growing up always believing that I was my mother's reject.

“I reconnected with my mother at a seminar; she had sought me out because by now she had seven children, nowhere to live, no job and no food to give them. The short version is I bought her a piece of land, built a house on it, found her a job and moved my youngest brother in with me so that I could mentor him. Today he's a 3rd year law student.

“The statement made about Jesus being the head cornerstone, the redemptive blood of my Savior and my relationship with him was what helped me to forgive my mother and made it easy for me to become the head cornerstone in her life. She rejected me and gave me away and a few years later I was the one she needed.”

What a great testimony—one who was rejected became the cornerstone for others, particularly her family. It hurts to be rejected—whether you are seven or seventy-five—whether it is by your peers or by your own family.

When we are rejected we don't give up. Instead we allow Christ to use that rejection to help us grow in maturity and to help us to better minister to others who also feel rejected.

Remember the story of the leper who came into Christ's presence and shouted "Unclean. Unclean." For a leper was forbidden to come into contact with other people. The man's body was covered with decaying flesh and running sores. What does Jesus do? Moved by compassion he reaches out and touches the man's decaying body and the man was made whole. Jesus is the wounded healer, and those of us who have been wounded are called to be healers as well.

Perhaps I am not talking to you this morning. Perhaps you have never been rejected. Perhaps you have never been wounded. That's wonderful in a way. It is also sad. That means you have never known what it is to feel the ministering touch of a man with nail prints in his hands. And you are at a great disadvantage in ministering to others.

There are some of you, however, for whom the pain of rejection is all too real. Hang in there. There is a man with nail prints in his hands and feet who says it really does matter that you keep going. And remember, there are those who need you to be their wounded healer just as Christ has ministered to you.