

Streetsville United Church

Sunday, February 3, 2019

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“JESUS’ REJECTION; OUR ACCEPTANCE”

Luke 4:29,30

The Christian faith is full of paradoxes, statements which contain opposites but which are nonetheless profoundly true. For example, Christians proclaim that God’s Son is at once fully human and fully divine. Another is that Christ died so that we might have life. And that the Cross, the sign of terrible human cruelty, is the greatest sign of God’s love. Here’s a few more. In losing ourselves we find ourselves. By giving we receive. The first shall be last. When we are weak we are strong. Here’s one I want to focus on today. Jesus’ rejection means our acceptance.

We read last week of Jesus standing in the synagogue at Nazareth, reading a portion of Isaiah, then sitting down and saying, “Today, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” At first, the people spoke well of him and were amazed at his gracious words. Then they asked, “Is this not Joseph’s son?” In other words, they began wondering, “How could this Scripture possibly be true about him?” Jesus could see where this was going. They wanted him to perform a sign to prove himself. So Jesus said to them, ‘You will say, “Do the things here in your hometown that we heard you did in Capernaum.” But Jesus didn’t do those things in his hometown. Mark’s Gospel tells us that it was because of their lack of faith. Jesus told them, “Truly, I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown.” Jesus reminded them of some stories from Scripture – when Elijah was sent to help a poor Gentile widow at Zarephath, and when none of the lepers in Israel were cleansed except for Naaman the Syrian. Jesus himself was doing works in Capernaum with its mixed Jewish and Gentile population. The truth that God was at work outside Israel filled the people with rage. They were God’s chosen people, yet God was reaching out with power and mercy to Gentiles. And in their anger they rejected Jesus. They drove him out of town, led him to the brow of the hill and tried to throw him off a cliff. But miraculously he passed through them, and went on his way.

We shouldn’t be surprised. So often Jesus knew rejection. Herod tried to kill him soon after he was born. John writes, “He came to his own people, and his own did not accept him.” Even the Gentiles across the Sea rejected him when he drove evil spirits from a possessed man into a herd of pigs. Jesus was rejected by the elders and scribes. His words brought comfort and hope to many but threatened the powerful. So the religious and political authorities conspired to nail him to a cross. It was Jesus’ fate to be rejected at every turn. Recall those words from Isaiah which are sung with great emphasis in the Messiah, “He was REJECTED.” The sinless one was rejected by sinners. Of course he was, because sinners cannot stand the presence of such moral purity. Even Peter once said to him, “Get away from Lord, for I am a sinful man.”

Now we may find comfort in knowing that Jesus himself was rejected. We can identify with him and he with us. For we know it too – from a young age. Even our friends sometimes reject us, and leave us on the outside looking in. Sometimes we are rejected because we are just not talented enough or smart enough. There are only so many places in the school band or on a school team. We may be rejected when we apply to get into a certain course. When there are 100 applications for a job, it's inevitable that some very good applicants are rejected. In the dating game most of us go through a few rejections before finding the right marriage partner. Then we realized that the rejections we suffered were for the best. Sadly, even some marriage partners are rejected for another. Such rejection is very painful indeed.

And it's not just that we are rejected. Like the people of Nazareth, we sometimes do the rejecting and not always for good reasons. We reject others because of their skin colour, their country of origin, their religion, their handicap, their social status. Sometimes we reject God. Isn't that the downfall of the human race – that we have turned from God, tried to hide from him, rejected his truth and guidance and love? Many people in this world still reject the Son of God and his saving grace. They disbelieve him, mock him, despise him, use his name in vain. Yes, like Jesus we know what it is to be rejected. And we sometimes reject others, too.

Now we need a way to cope with rejection. Sometimes we do so by finding humor in it. When I was younger I occasionally read Mad, that cheeky humor magazine. I came across a letter that the Mad magazine editor sent to people whose submissions had been rejected. "Dear Contributor: Sorry, but we've got bad news. You've been rejected. Don't take this personally though. All of us feel rejected at one time or another. At least that's what our group therapist tells us here at MAD. He says we shouldn't worry about it. So that should be your attitude "What – me worry?" Besides, although you've been rejected, things could have been a lot worse. Your material might have been ACCEPTED! Then where would you be? Sincerely, Al Feldstein, Editor. P.S. Our group therapist also mentioned that many people are so rejected by a rejection that they don't try again. And we wouldn't want THAT! We really WOULD like you to keep sending us your article ideas and manuscripts...so we can keep sending you these idiotic rejection slips."

Well, that's one way of dealing with the pain of rejection, with humor and a positive attitude. We pull ourselves up and try again. We persevere. Many inventions and scientific breakthroughs and influential books came from people whose previous efforts had been rejected many times.

But the best way to deal with rejection is to have an unfailing sense of being accepted, a place where the words, "You are accepted" are always true, no matter what. Many of us we find that acceptance in our families. I hope the church is a place where you will always feel welcome and accepted. But the very best way is by knowing that you are always accepted by God. No doubt Jesus dealt with his many rejections by remembering words he heard at his baptism. "You are my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased."

You see, I need to mention another kind of rejection. Do you ever fear being rejected by God? What could be worse? And if we are sensitive to who we are, if we really examine our hearts then we may wonder about that. How could we sinners be accepted by the one who is three times Holy? How could we who have rejected other people and even sometimes rejected God

ever be accepted by him? The singer Kurt Cobain took his own life back in 1994. In his suicide note he wrote these heart-wrenching words, “Jesus wouldn’t want me for a sunbeam.” Isn’t that sad? But do we ever wonder, “Will God reject me? Will I be forsaken and cast away? Will the promises of the Christian faith ever come true for me? Am I acceptable to God now and in eternity? Does Jesus want me for a sunbeam?”

The answer to these latter three questions is, yes, unequivocally yes! To be in Christ by faith is to be accepted by God always. We are accepted by God because Jesus was rejected. This is the great paradox- Jesus’ rejection means our acceptance.

You see, Jesus had one more rejection to face. Jesus’ words from the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” are open to many interpretations. But the deepest is that the beloved Son really was rejected by the Father for a brief time, though on that dark afternoon it may have seemed to him like an eternity. On the Cross our sins and iniquities were laid on him, and Holy God could not bear to look at what his Son had become. The Father deeply desired to save his Son, but he had to turn away and allow him to die. Jesus was rejected by humans; and for a time even by his Father, as he became sin for our sake. Never was anyone more fully alone than Jesus was as he died on the cross. But this was a necessity born out of God’s great love for us. Our sins would have led to our eternal rejection, our perishing forever away from Holy God. But Jesus took our place and by his death paid the price for our sins.

Of course, Jesus’ rejection was only for a time. On the third day God raised his crucified Son from the grave to live forevermore. The Son was restored to full relationship with the Father, and from Father and Son flowed forth the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of love which binds us to God forever. When we put our faith in Christ God looks at us just as he looks at his own dear Son, righteous, acceptable, perfect, beloved children. In spite of our sin you and I wear the righteous robes of Jesus! What a great paradox. We the unacceptable are accepted by God forever and ever! Nothing in all creation, neither our sin nor death itself can separate us from God’s love. Through faith in Christ we are born again to new life and eternal life. Jesus was rejected and forsaken for a time, so that we never will be rejected or forsaken. Jesus’ rejection means our acceptance.

Have you gone somewhere, fearing you’re too late or the place will be filled and you’ll be turned away? But at the door you hear these words, “Don’t worry. There is room. There’s a place for you.” And with great relief you go in. So it is with God. The Risen Christ is the doorkeeper to God’s present and future Kingdom. With our faith placed in Christ there is no fear of being rejected. Jesus says to you and me, “No matter where you’ve been; no matter how far you’ve strayed, no matter if you went to the wrong door for a time, you are accepted. There is a place for you.” His arms, the very arms of God, reach out from the cross with divine acceptance.

I invite you to receive this sacrament today with faith and gratitude. The broken bread and the cup of wine remind us that Jesus’ rejection means our acceptance. They are the signs you are eternally accepted by God. Jesus calls you his sunbeam. And by the power of God’s love we are being formed into those who accept one another.

A father came to Canada with his family as refugees. On a cold winter's day, he took his young daughter to Canadian school for the first time. She was welcomed by the school's administration and by her teacher, but still the father worried. At lunchtime, he walked back to the school and stood far off on the sidewalk. All around children were playing together and having fun in the snow. Their loud voices filled the air. He noticed his daughter come out of the school dressed warmly. She stood alone for a time near the door. Then after a few minutes he watched as another little girl walked over to her, took her by the hand and led her into a group of children. Soon, she was laughing and playing right along with the others. The father walked home with a sense of peace and gratitude. Acceptance is a wonderful blessing.

Jesus' rejection means our acceptance. By God. Forever So Paul tells us in Romans 15:7 "Accept one another therefore, just as Christ has accepted you, for the glory of God."