

The 18th Sunday after Pentecost: Holy Trinity Church: October 8, 2017

Proper 22: Matthew 21:33-46: *All are called to God's Table to Eat & Drink*

Preached

By

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In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

One of the characteristics of many Eastern cultures is how deeply sensitive people are to other people's feelings. For example, one publication, the Financial Times, carried this rejection notice, written to a writer by an overly polite editor of a Chinese economic journal: "We have read your manuscript with boundless delight. If we were to publish your paper," says the editor, "it would be impossible for us to publish any work of lower standard. And as it is unthinkable that in the next thousand years we shall see its equal, we are, to our regret, compelled to return your divine composition, and to beg you a thousand times to overlook our short sight and timidity." Wouldn't it be nice if all rejection slips were so tactful?

Actually, most people experience rejection as something cruel and sometimes heart-breaking. Today's Gospel reading from Matthew is all about rejection.

Writer John Bradshaw was credited with popularizing ideas such as healthy and toxic shame, the wounded inner child and the dysfunctional family.

Bradshaw was born into a troubled family and abandoned by an alcoholic father who himself was also abandoned by his own father. He studied for the Roman Catholic priesthood, but an addiction to alcohol led to his decision to ends his plans for ordination. John Bradshaw's life story of love and hate, his parents' broken marriage, his childhood pain and alcoholism caused him to begin identifying with the innocent child caught up in the unpredictable changes and eccentric actions of his parents' love. He thinks of his own passionate loves, the woman he loved and left and the one who left him.

Especially the one who left him! He remembers that pain. He said, "It was like someone had hammered a huge iron nail in the middle of my chest." He remembers how he obsessed about her, how he cried, raged and felt such incredible remorse. Then he thinks of his mother. How at twenty-six she was raising three children all alone. She worked hard for a pittance to support her family. She was a devout Roman Catholic. Her faith would not allow her to remarry. Bradshaw said, "From the time my dad left her, she never touched another man, what an incredible faith. What commitment to one's beliefs. And what a terrible thing it is to be rejected."

My sisters and brothers, rejection is particularly hard on us when we are young. This is when we are still forming opinions about our own self-worth. We ask ourselves, am I acceptable? Am I lovable? Am I worthy of my place in the sun?

I want to share with you this heart-breaking story that I read years ago and never forgot. Listen to these words from a young woman: "When I was ten, my parents got a divorce. Naturally, my father told me about it, because he was my favorite. Their conversation went like the following: "Honey, I know it's been kind of bad for you these past few days, and I don't want to make it worse. But there's something I have to tell you. Honey, your mother and I got a divorce. I know you don't want this, but it has to be done. Your mother and I just don't get along like we used to. I'm already packed and my plane is leaving in half an hour." "But, Daddy, why do you have to leave?" "Well, honey, your mother and I can't live together anymore." "I know that Daddy, but I mean why do you have to leave town?" "Oh. Well, I've got someone waiting for me in New Jersey." "But, Daddy, will I ever see you again? Sure you will, honey. We'll work something out. But, what? I mean, you'll be living in New Jersey, and I'll be living here in Washington. Maybe your mother will agree to you spending two weeks in the summer and two weeks in the winter with me. Why not more often? I don't think she'll agree to two weeks in the

summer and two in the winter. Well, it can't hurt to try. I know, honey, but we'll have to work it out later. My plane leaves in twenty minutes and I've got to get to the airport. Now I'm going to get my luggage, and I want you to go to your room so you don't have to watch me leave, and no long goodbyes either. Okay, Daddy. Goodbye. Don't forget to write. I won't. Goodbye. Now go to your room. Okay. Daddy, I don't want you to go! I know, honey. But I have to. Why? You wouldn't understand, honey. Yes, I would. No, you wouldn't. Oh well, Goodbye. Goodbye. Now go to your room. Hurry up. Okay. Well I guess that's the way life goes sometimes. Yes, honey. That's the way life goes sometimes. My brothers and sisters, would it surprise you to know that after that ten year old girl's father walked out the door, she never ever heard from him or saw him again? It is a terrible thing to feel rejected.

Jesus was rejected. That's what our Gospel reading from Matthew tells us today. *"The stone that the builders rejected, has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes."* Jesus was quoting Psalm 118: 22-23. He was applying it to his own life. People in Jesus own family dismissed his preaching and teaching as lunacy. Once, when he was teaching, Jesus sisters and brothers came to get him and bring him home because they heard that he had gone out of his mind. People of Jesus own faith labeled him a blasphemer and a sinner. The chief priests, the Pharisees and the elders

actively plotted to discredit him and to kill him. And the eventual price for his rejection was the cross. The Lamb of God, the Messiah sent by God to save them was rejected by his own people. The gentle carpenter from Nazareth was crucified like a criminal between two thieves.

Most of us know what it is to be rejected. Maybe you have been rejected by someone you loved. Maybe you have been rejected in school or in the workplace. Some of you may bear scars that no one else can see, scars of deep disappointment and pain. Surprisingly, some of you may have happy marriages, good families, and still you feel rejected. You don't even know why you feel this way. After all, no one you love has turned their back on you. But still, unspoken feelings of rejection haunt you. You see, the way we handle rejection as young people and adults is determined by whether we already feel rejected or accepted. Some young people can be left out of a group and it doesn't faze them a bit. Why? Because they already feel loved and accepted at home. They don't need to be affirmed by their peers. At the same time there are adults who go to pieces when they are rejected. Perhaps it's when a spouse walks out on them. The ordeal is so crushing that they never move beyond the pain. Others pick up the pieces and get on with their lives. So, what is the difference? Usually, it is because the latter group already feels loved. They do not depend on a particular relationship to define their worth as individuals.

The feeling of acceptance is something that happens to us in the first years of our lives. Some of us had parents who knew how to love us unconditionally and without restraint, and so they instilled within us feelings of acceptance, stability and security, feelings that will stay with us all our lives. But others of us had well-meaning parents who did not know how to give such unconditional love perhaps because they never experienced such love themselves. And so many of us go through life looking for the acceptance we never got as children. It is a crippling experience. But, there is hope. So, where do we find this hope?

We find this hope in the same place Jesus found hope. Listen again to these words from Psalm 118: *"The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes."* Jesus who was rejected became the Christ and Sacred Scripture tells us, *"this was the God's doing."*

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ, here is the challenge for all of us this week. This is where hope is found for all of us who carry around feelings of rejection, inadequacy and inferiority. It is found in the unconditional love of God. It is found in laying down your self-doubts and fears on the altar of God right here in your Holy Trinity Church and asking God to heal your wounded souls.

One of the greatest gifts my parents ever gave to me and my two brothers and three sisters was that God loved us totally and unconditionally, and that God had a purpose for our lives. We knew right to the very core of our being, deep in our souls, that mom and dad loved all of us. No one who knows the unconditional love of God in their heart will allow the world to make them feel rejected for long. When we have the love of God in our hearts, we carry a sense of security and stability that the world cannot take away from us. And that sense of unconditional love is available to all who will receive it. There is one place that you and I are never rejected. That place stands directly in front of you at God's holy table and where God always, always calls you to eat and drink.

My dear sisters and brothers, here at Holy Trinity Church we have an open communion table, which means that no matter how long it has been, no matter what has gone on in your life, no matter what denomination you may come from or no denomination at all, the risen Christ calls you to this table to eat and drink. *"The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this is the lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes."* AMEN.