

Rejection – no matter who you are – hurts. When I was a town student attending Michigan Lutheran Seminary, I was on the outside looking in. Most of the students were dorm students. They built close friendships. I walked home every night. I was not in the in crowd clique. At graduation, they labeled me as the class clown. I tried to do funny things to get attention. How about you? Ever felt rejected? Maybe it was in school and your class was picking teams and you were always picked last. Maybe it was for a promotion or a new job. Maybe it was a boy or girl you had your eye on. Maybe it was a loan application. Maybe it isn't *you* that was rejected – maybe it was your creative, out-of-the-box idea that you know would solve a problem if someone would just listen to you. Maybe it was a special gift you had picked out for someone and they treated it like it was a total disappointment. Whatever rejection you have experienced, there is Someone who has experienced an even greater rejection.

Jesus willingly came to earth just for the reason of saving humanity from their sin. It was man's fault that we needed saving, but when we needed a Savior, Jesus stepped up and left Heaven to come to earth and pay God's price in our place. You'd think that all of humanity would be grateful. But no. The majority of the people rejected him.

Since the time of Adam until the birth of Jesus, approximately 4000 years had passed. As God removed Adam and Even from the Garden, He also told them that through the Seed (descendant) of a woman (Eve) would come one who would crush the head of Satan. From that time until Jesus lived on earth, the Jewish people had been waiting for their promised Messiah. And when the Messiah stood right in front of them, they didn't even realize the Messiah was there.

Granted, they had an opinion about what their Messiah was supposed to be. They saw Him as a royal person who would come in and conquer and throw off the yoke of the Romans, restoring the their land and making them a nation again. Jesus didn't fit the molded view they had created for the Messiah. Instead of being a royal commander coming to their rescue, they saw Jesus as just an ordinary Jewish man who's father was a carpenter and his mother was that teenage girl that got pregnant before she was married. In fact, when Jesus told Philip to "Follow Me," Philip went to get Nathanael and said, "Come see. We have found the One Moses wrote about in the Law (and so did the prophets): Jesus the son of Joseph, from Nazareth!" (John 1:45). Philip responded, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Nathanael did end up following Jesus and became one of the 12 disciples. But over and over again Jesus was rejected.

On the night of his birth the innkeeper rejected him because there was no room in his inn for Him. Instead Mary and Joseph was sent to the stables and there Jesus was born and laid in a manger. In Mathew 8 – a whole city asked Jesus to leave. In Mark 6 – Jesus' home town of Nazareth were offended by him when he taught in the synagogue. The same story is told in Luke 4, but Luke states the people were "enraged." So much so that they got up and drove Him out of the city, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw Him down the cliff. *In Matthew 21, Jesus is the "cornerstone" that is rejected by the builders. Both Matthew and Luke record that the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, Capernaum, and Decapolis did not repent when Jesus preached there.* In Luke 9 a Samaritan village would not accept him. In John 6, many who were following Him, left Him. And in our verse for today they are trying to stone Him because they think He is blaspheming. Oh, they were OK with him doing "good works." He could do all the miracles he wanted in the name of God – just not on a

Sabbath and as long as He didn't proclaim Himself to be the Messiah.

Our story tonight has the Jews picking up stones to execute Jesus. They believe that he has committed an act of blasphemy. By saying, I and the Father are one. Jesus was claiming to be God. The Jews didn't believe him.

How would you feel if you told someone the truth, and they called you a liar. It would hurt, hurt deeply. We all have this innate desire to be liked and accepted. If they didn't believe what we said, we would try to show them that what we said was the truth. That's what Jesus does. Jesus goes back to the Old Testament. He tells them that in Psalm 82, the writer tells us that men were appointed by God as judges to represent God. They were called gods. They were called sons of the most high. Thus, if God's judges have been called gods, not because they are divine, but because they are God's representatives, how much more do I deserve to identify as God. I am God's own son. The Father sent me from heaven to get his work done. I and the Father are one in mission, and we are one in essence. Look at how the Messiah was predicted to do miracles. I am doing those miracles. Again they tried to seize him and stone him, but he escaped their grasp. His time had not yet come.

So many people in our world today follow in the footsteps of these Jews. In world religions like Islam, Mormonism, Hinduism, they all look upon Jesus as just a great prophet, not true God. They are ready to throw stones at Jesus for making that claim. You say you are true God Jesus. That is blasphemy. But let's not just throw stones at world religions. We throw stones at Jesus as well. Don't we have daily gods in our lives? And I'm not talking about judges as God's representatives as in Psalm 82. A god is a term for that to which we are to look for all good and in which we are to find refuge in all need. For some of us money is our god. We look to it for security, and happiness. Or what about possessions, honor, prestige, accomplishments, our wisdom and knowledge. Whatever is more important to us than a close relationship with Jesus can rightly be called our God. We may not have accused Jesus of blasphemy, but we do have little gods that so often take his place. Yet, none of these can meet the task of giving us all good and refuge in all need. And the one true God, who holds us accountable, can see not only our folly, but more seriously, our transgressions.

But instead of ignoring our transgressions, Jesus comes to help us. Jesus embraces the wounds of criticism against him by claiming to be the Son of God himself. The name Jesus means Yahweh saves. Or God saves. Jesus in his life, death, and resurrection bore that name to the fullest of its meaning. C.S. Lewis once claimed about Jesus that he was not a madman in living and dying as the very Messiah his name conveyed. On the contrary, "this man, having been killed, was yet alive, and His death, in some manner incomprehensible to human thought, has effected a real change in our relations to the awful and righteous Lord, and a change in our favor." That is a claim none of us can make. But Jesus can, and does, for our sake.

For all the times we did not put the Father's will in first place, Jesus came to die for us. For all the times, we loved things, and people more than God, Jesus came to die for us. For all the times we have worried and showed a lack of trust in God, Jesus came to die for us. And we know that his payment on that cross was sufficient. No mere man could have made a payment that was good for the sins of the world. Only someone who was true God. Someone who was one with the Father. And Jesus is the one who fits that description. Jesus put his name on the line for our sake, that we may have our names joined to him. Isaiah proclaimed the marks of the

suffering servant: He was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his stripes we are healed. On this Ash Wednesday, we claim the marks of the suffering servant as the marks our Lord bore for us. What is it that wounds and bruises our Lord? It is our sinfulness, our transgressions, our iniquities, even our punishment. All of that he bears and takes to himself. But what he gives to us, instead is to make us whole, and by his taking these sins we are healed. The wounds of blasphemy. Rejection. Unafraid to face stones and harsh words. All for us.