

"ON BEING REJECTED"

A Sermon By

Philip A. C. Clarke

Park Avenue United Methodist Church
106 East 86th Street
New York, New York 10028
October 6, 1996

She was crushed. "Yes...as long as nobody notices". She started to cry, but she tells us it was a turning point in her young life. She determined to become more self-confident and to ignore the taunts and the teasing from her peers. And as some of you know, her story does have a happy ending. Oh, if only all of life's rejections turned out as well. I understand that a couple of years later she left for Hollywood and landed a TV role on the Bill Cosby Show. And after the show's first season, she even went back for her 6th Grade Graduation and everyone lined up to get her autograph, including the boy who had turned her down. I wish that life always offered "happy endings", but unfortunately it doesn't.

Rejection comes into our lives and yes - it hurts. Do any of you know where the phrase "To turn him down" comes from? It originated in this country back in Colonial days. It had to do with a refusal of a marriage proposal. When a bashful suitor wanted to find out, without asking, if the woman he was courting would marry him, he would place a "courting mirror"...face upward...on a table in front of his sweetheart. ~~after~~ After first looking into it himself and presumably leaving his own likeness in it. And if this young woman cared to accept him, she would pick up the mirror and smile at his likeness which she was supposed to see there. But...if she did not want him, she simply turned the mirror down and with it, his face.

Have you ever been "turned down?". I'm not asking you to lift a hand on that one. Most of us have at some time in our lives. Yes, sometimes rejection comes to us in romance and sometimes rejection comes from other significant people in our lives.

Remember from lessons in English literature that Elizabeth Barrett married the poet, Robert Browning....against the wishes of her parents? In fact, they objected so strenuously to her marriage that they disowned her. As everyone knows, her marriage was a beautiful and a happy relationship for both Elizabeth and Robert. But did you know that in spite of the hurt of being rejected by her family, that Elizabeth Barrett Browning continued to write regularly to them. In each letter, she told her father and mother how much she continued to love them. She received no response...no acknowledgement from them. Then, after total silence for about ten years from her parents, a large package arrived. Elizabeth Barrett eagerly opened the package and there was a box containing all the letters she had written them since her marriage to Robert. Not one of those letters had been opened and read!

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Some experience rejection in their careers and with the down-sizing that's going on in many large corporations today, many are feeling rejection where it hurts....in the pocketbook. And if you happen to be in that growing group, my friend....you are not alone.

*Topic shared with
Michele MARSH & Reggie HARRIS -*

JESUS KNEW WHAT IT IS

Today's text from Matthew's Gospel reminds us that Jesus knew something of the pain of rejection.

He says:

"Have you never read in the Scriptures, 'The stone that was rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing and it is amazing in our eyes'?"

"The stone that was rejected...." What stone, we ask, is that? He's talking about Himself. Jesus was rejected. Would you say that with me, please. JESUS WAS REJECTED. Let me hear it. It's important for us to remember. The next time you are turned down for a promotion or the next time somebody higher up in the "pecking order" comes along and snubs you, the next time you have a spat with someone you love and they walk away leaving you feeling alone and completely devastated, think of those words. Jesus was rejected. Even Forrest Gump can remember that. We worship a triumphant Lord...yes, but before He was triumphant, He was rejected.

Sometimes in the loneliness and the hurt of rejection, we may feel that we are the only ones who have ever been hurt that way, but we're not. It is a common experience. Everyone who has ever walked on the face of this earth has been rejected at some time or other in his or her life, including Jesus. The symbol of the cross should remind us of that. Before it was on our church altars, it was on His back. We cherish the cross as the symbol of our salvation, but remember that before it was the symbol of salvation, it was the symbol of rejection, of pain, of failure.

A West German theologian by the name of Dr. Hanz Schwarz tells of attending a conference at which he met a Hindu from New Delhi, India. The Hindu leader told this conference of how he had once attended a conference in Rome which gave him the opportunity to visit St. Peter's and see for the first time the world-famous Pieta by Michelangelo. He conceded that the sculpture of the dad Jesus held in the arms of the morning mother, Mary, was an artistic masterpiece....yet, somehow...this deceased Jesus remained alien to him, as did the many crosses with the suffering Jesus on them that he saw while in Rome.

A Buddha, he said, would never have been depicted like that. Buddha died as if he were slipping away into a better beyond with a smile on his lips (from eating poisoned mushrooms, as I recall) and his face relieved that his suffering was now over. A suffering Jesus, the man from India confessed, simply contradicted his idea of a redeemer. Dr. Schwarz went on to comment that,

"The figure of Buddha is typical for the way salvation is depicted in most other religions. Savior figures usually do not identify....with the suffering and the death of this world. They want to draw their adherents away from this world and its suffering and lure them to a better beyond."

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I enjoy that television program Biography. A while back they did the life story of Winston Churchill. They spoke of some unpublished letters that recently went on sale in London. These letters, written by a young Winston Churchill, reveal that one of this century's greatest leaders knew what it was to be rejected.

Early on his life he proposed marriage to a Muriel Wilson, an heiress, and daughter of a wealthy shipping tycoon. Soon after rejecting his proposal of marriage, Churchill sent a handwritten letter asking to see her again. He was thirty years of age and a year younger than she.

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DEVELOPMENT

There may be some present who recognize the name of Tempestt Bledsoe. As an eight year old in a Chicago grammar school, she developed a huge crush on a boy in school. During that school year, he was going out with the prettiest girl in school, but on the last day of school, they broke up and he came to Tempestt to confide his feelings and pour out his little heart. Romance seems to be starting at a younger age now-a-days.

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She was crushed. "Yes...as long as nobody notices". She started to cry, but she tells us it was a turning point in her young life. She determined to become more self-confident and to ignore the taunts and the teasing from her peers. And as some of you know, her story does have a happy ending. Oh, if only all of life's rejections turned out as well. I understand that a couple of years later she left for Hollywood and landed a TV role on the Bill Cosby Show. And after the show's first season, she even went back for her 6th Grade Graduation and everyone lined up to get her autograph, including the boy who had turned her down. I wish that life always offered "happy endings", but unfortunately it doesn't.

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CLOSING I like this closing story about G. Campbell Morgan, who was a candidate for ministry in the Wesleyan Church. He had passed all of his preliminary exams and had only one test to face...what back then was called the "trial sermon". In an enormous auditorium that could easily seat about a thousand people there sat three ministers and 75 others who came to listen to him deliver his trial sermon. Morgan was not up to the task. And two weeks later, his name appeared on the list of those who were refused entrance to the ministry that year.

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There are many believers who could have that carved on their tombstones. "Rejected on earth. Accepted in heaven". Yes, keep trusting....in God and in His ways. Be faithful. God will be faithful to you. I believe He will heal your hurts and give you hope once again. As we now prepare to take the bread and receive the cup this day, let us remember that our salvation has come at a very, very high cost. That we are recipients of a most magnificent grace. Yes, an amazing grace. We are not rejected by God, but accepted by Him.

PRAYER Make us sensitive once again, O God, to Your nearness...to Your presence...to Your peace and power. We feel that the deepest things within us are being stirred up in this time of worship....that down below the surface of our lives, Your Spirit is at work....bringing forth the highest and the best that we are meant to be. Wrestle with us until we are conquered by Your Love. Help us to amend our lives and by Your Holy Spirit renew within each one of us a heart of grace. Increase our trust and renew our faith. Minister to our personal needs and restore to us the joy of Your salvation. For the race is short, O God, even at its longest and we would run it well, and always to Your glory. Amen.

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