

“OUT TO GET JESUS: II – THE PEOPLE”

Karen F. Bunnell  
Elkton United Methodist Church  
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2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent

Psalm 27

Luke 13:31-35

Is there anything much worse in life than being rejected? If you’ve lived any length of time, chances are that you have been rejected one time or another in your life. So you know how much it hurts –

Starting way back in your “growing-up” years –

Standing on that field in phys ed while captains picked people to be on their teams and you were the very last one chosen . . .

Or never getting invited to the cool parties with the “in” crowd that everyone else was invited to . . .

Or not getting invited to homecoming or the prom . . .

And then, as you got older, rejection might have come –

When you didn’t get into that college you had your heart set on attending . . .

When you didn’t get picked for the job you really wanted . . .

And those are nothing compared to really painful rejections –

Turned away from by a boyfriend/girlfriend, or spouse . . .

Rejected by a parent, sibling, or child . . .

Rejection stinks! It just plain does. To be turned away from, does something to you. It hurts emotionally and physically, sometimes it causes you to question yourself, it certainly can weaken you. And it can be heartbreaking.

Such was the case for Jesus as he made his way to the cross. He was rejected by so many. So many turned away from him when he needed them the most – in his hour of greatest need, they weren’t there. A lot of people did that to him – some were those closest to him, like his disciples; others were leaders in society, even religious leaders – and those – the disciples and religious leaders – we’ll hear about

in the coming weeks. But the ones I want to talk about today – are the people – the crowds – the everyday, “you and me” kind of people.

Let’s go back and look at the people throughout Jesus’ brief ministry. Remember, at the beginning, Jesus was, well, a bit of a novelty. They didn’t quite know what to make of him. Everything was brand new, and everything he was doing was quite astonishing – so people gathered around him just to see what was going on.

The more Jesus did – the more he spoke, and the more he loved and cared for people, the more he healed those who were hurting – the bigger the crowds became. He was gathering a regular fan club – they couldn’t get enough of him. Scripture tells us that there were even times when he was overwhelmed by the crowds and had to find time to slip away to be by himself and with God.

The longer his ministry went, the bigger the crowds became. They clamored for his attention, grabbed for his robes, sought his healing, listened for his teaching. He was turning the world upside down and they couldn’t get enough of him.

And on Palm Sunday, when he came into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey they shouted “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” They threw down their cloaks for him to walk upon and waved palm branches. It was a regular love fest! What a moment it must have been for him!

Oh, that it could have gone on forever, but almost as soon as he got off the donkey and back on his feet, it started – rejection was coming – and indeed, from some of the very same people who had cheered him in the procession.

Consider this – it was a week from Palm Sunday to Easter; but consider this even more – it was five days from Palm Sunday, from the triumphal entry into Jerusalem until Good Friday, and Jesus’ death on the cross. How could everything have changed so drastically in five short days? Why did so many reject him, turn away from him, change their shouts of “Hosanna!” into shouts of “Crucify him!”?

There are several reasons, I think.

Some turned away and rejected Jesus because he wasn’t being the kind of Messiah they thought he should be – they were disappointed in him. They wanted a conquering hero, a man of military might who could take down the enemy – instead he spoke of peace and turning the other cheek. Even though they had been patient with him, when push came to shove, they wanted him to show power and might – and he did, but not in the way they wanted – so they were disappointed.

Sadly, many today still turn away from Jesus out of disappointment. He’s not the Savior they expected him to be. He hasn’t kept trouble out of their lives – they’ve suffered in some way and he didn’t make it all better – so they turn away

from him. They lost a job or lost a home or worst of all, lost someone they loved, and well, if Jesus couldn't fix that, they don't want any part of him. So they turn away and reject him.

Some of the crowd in Jerusalem did just that – they rejected him because they were disappointed that he was not the Messiah they wanted him to be..

And still others turned away and rejected him because he was asking too much of them – it was way too difficult than they thought it would be. Think about some of the things that happened between Palm Sunday and Easter – Jesus sat down and ate with a leper, he showed love to the woman who anointed him with expensive perfume, and he drove out the moneychangers from the temple and overturned their tables. And everytime he invited his followers to do the same things – love those society called unloveable, do the right thing no matter what the cost. Put that on top of his consistent teaching and example about loving your enemies, giving all you have for others – well, the people were threatened by that – it was too much to ask of them, or so they thought.

They just couldn't do what Jesus was calling them to do, and be the kind of people he was calling them to be – it would cost them too much – so they turned away and rejected him.

Again, sadly, in this day and age, many people do the same thing. In this world in which we live which seems to hearken more to the Old Testament's "an eye for an eye" philosophy, it's hard, it takes incredible courage and faith to turn the other cheek and love our enemies. We live in a world, as we've seen, that is obsessing over borders – and who should be in and who should be out – and Jesus calls us to be welcoming to all. For some, he's asking too much so they turn away and reject him. It's just too difficult to try and live as he wants us to live.

Finally, there were others in the crowd in Jerusalem in Jesus' day who turned away and rejected him because of fear- plain old fear. They were afraid of the powers that be. The tide was turning, the leaders in the government and yes, in religious circles, were out to get Jesus – and so they dare not be seen as his followers. So they turned away and rejected him.

Is that happening today? Maybe so. Surely government and societal leaders are not outwardly turning against Jesus, but we all know that society as a whole is. Well maybe not turning against him, but not really caring all that much about him. So frankly, some people today turn away and reject him basically out of apathy. They don't need him and they're okay with that.

In those last days of his earthly life, Jesus felt rejection all around him, and he was hurt – not for himself, so much, but for the ones who rejected him. Listen again to his mournful words, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . . how often have I desired to

gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!”

All he wanted to do was love people, and he grieved for them that they would not accept his love. With that beautiful imagery of a mother hen and brood of babies – all he wanted to do was wrap his arms around people, but they turned away – and he grieved that for himself and for them.

At the end of his life, when he was almost all alone, save for a few gathered at the foot of the cross, Jesus would have had every right to be angry and bitter. He would have every right to yell out in anger and agony from the cross – instead, the first words he said were “Father, forgive them . . .”

What wondrous love. The love he had for the people who rejected him then. It’s the love he has for the people who reject him even now, and the love he has for you and for me. Even when we turn away because we’re disappointed, or afraid, or intimidated by what it means to be a true follower – no matter what the reason, he loves us still. What wondrous love.

The Good News of the Gospel, my friends, is that it is never too late to turn back to Jesus. He waits, like that mother hen, to gather you into his arms and love you. It’s never too late.

As we move ever closer to Holy Week, to Jesus’ journey to that cruel cross, may you and I stick with him, no matter what the cost. May we not be counted among those who rejected him and turned away. Instead, as the hymn we’re about to sing calls us to do – may we “take up our cross and follow him” – no matter what the cost, knowing that he loves us with a wondrous love that never lets us go. May it be so.

Amen.