

**Luke 20:9-20 (Fifth Sunday in Lent—Series C)**

**“Jesus Was Rejected. We Are Not.”**

**Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Enfield CT**

**April 3, 2022**

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

Our text is the Gospel Lesson recorded in Luke 20:

And he began to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard and let it out to tenants and went into another country for a long while. <sup>10</sup> When the time came, he sent a servant to the tenants, so that they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. <sup>11</sup> And he sent another servant. But they also beat and treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. <sup>12</sup> And he sent yet a third. This one also they wounded and cast out. <sup>13</sup> Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.' <sup>14</sup> But when the tenants saw him, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.' <sup>15</sup> And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? <sup>16</sup> He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others." When they heard this, they said, "Surely not!" <sup>17</sup> But he looked directly at them and said, "What then is this that is written: "'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone'? <sup>18</sup> Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him." <sup>19</sup> The scribes and the chief priests sought to lay hands on him at that very hour, for they perceived that he had told this parable against them, but they feared the people. <sup>20</sup> So they watched him and sent spies, who pretended to be sincere, that they might catch him in something he said, so as to deliver him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the governor.

Rejection comes in all forms. Brian was a young man that felt the call of God in his life.

He came from a really close family. He finished college and then went off to seminary. After finishing seminary, he came back home before going to his first church. He visited with all of his relatives for about a week. He stopped by the church and talked to his hometown pastor. The pastor asked him if he would like to preach this Sunday. He felt honored and took the pastor up on the invitation. Sunday morning came and after hours, yes—even days, of preparation he stepped up behind the pulpit looked out at the congregation of friends and relatives and started to expound the knowledge that he had learned. Well, his young niece, Kathleen, about six years old, stepped out into the aisle and put her hands on her hips, her left foot out in front of the other, her head cocked to one side. Then she said in a very loud

and clear voice for her age. "Uncle Brian, you don't know what you are talking about!"

Rejection is hard to handle from anybody, but from a six-year-old it is really taxing.

Most of us know firsthand what it feels like to be rejected. You ask that girl or guy out that you really, really like, and they turn you down. Heartbreak, rejection. You apply for job after job, sending out resume after resume, and each time the answer comes back, "No thank you." Heartbreak, rejection. We know how rejection feels, how completely horrible and awful it makes us feel. But what about how God feels when we reject Him and His Word?

Can the almighty God of heaven and earth feel rejection? Wouldn't He just blow it off and not make a big deal about it? No, He wouldn't, and He doesn't. In fact, rejection of the Lord and His Word deserves His wrath and punishment. It earns for us our rejection by God. The Lord spoke through to the people of Israel in the wilderness, "You shall not eat just one day, or two days, or five days, or ten days, or twenty days, but a whole month, until [meat] comes out at your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you, because you have rejected the LORD who is among you and have wept before him, saying, 'Why did we come out of Egypt?'" (Numbers 11:19-20). The prophet Samuel said to King Saul, "For you have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel" (1Samuel 15:26). Isaiah proclaimed to the people of Israel, "Therefore, as the tongue of fire devours the stubble, and as dry grass sinks down in the flame, so their root will be as rottenness, and their blossom go up like dust; for they have rejected the law of the LORD of hosts, and have despised the word of the Holy One of Israel" (Isaiah 5:24). And in Jeremiah 6 we read, "Hear, O earth; behold, I am bringing disaster upon this people, the fruit of their devices,

because they have not paid attention to my words; and as for my law, they have rejected it" (Jeremiah 6:19).

The theme of rejection also comes through loud and clear in our Gospel text today. Jesus' parable of the vineyard is pointed against the Jerusalem religious establishment (the scribes and the chief priests) who had again rejected God and His Word, especially rejecting the Word made Flesh, the Messiah-Savior, whom God had sent just as He promised He would. Jesus rehearsed the rejection of God's Word spoken through the prophets, the servants whom the Vineyard Owner (God the Father) sent to claim His rightful portion of the produce from the farmers (the religious leaders of Israel throughout history). What did the farmers do? They beat the servants. They treated them shamefully. They wounded and traumatized them and threw them out of the vineyard empty handed. That's just what the leaders of Israel did to God's prophets whom He sent with His Word of Law and Gospel. Their message was rejected. Israel did not repent. The people did not turn from wickedness and sin, even though the Lord's own messengers brought His first-hand Word to them. Throughout history, the Lord and His Word were rejected by Israel and her leaders.

But at the right time, the appointed time, the Father sent His beloved Son to the very people who rejected Him. But the same thing happened. We read in John 1:11, "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him" (John 1:11). This was especially true of the religious establishment—the chief priests and scribes. "When the farmers saw [the beloved Son] they conspired with one another saying, 'This One is the heir. Let us kill Him so that the inheritance might be ours.' And throwing Him outside the vineyard, they killed Him."

A rejected God. A rejected people. A rejected Messiah-Savior. Just like Israel and her religious leaders, you and I have also rejected God and His Word over the course of our lives. That's because we are sinners, too. We are hell-bent on doing things "our" way, regardless of what the Bible teaches, which is God's authoritative Word. That's the very nature of sin; it's all twisted and evil and so we are all turned in on ourselves, rejecting God—blind, dead, and enemies of the Lord. The just and holy God has to punish us and all humanity for rejecting Him as our God and rejecting His Word of truth as good, right, and salutary for our lives. Every time we cry out, "I did it MY way," instead of the Lord's way, God rejects us in our sin and condemns us to death and hell.

But what does God do with a rejected people? Does He just get rid of us and destroy us after we, time and again, reject Him and His messengers and His Word? No, the rejected God sends to His rejected people a rejected Messiah. Crazy, isn't it? Not really. It's amazing grace, amazing love. As we sang in the Hymn of the Day, it is a 'love unknown, My Savior's love to me, Love to the loveless shown That they might lovely be" (*LSB* 430:1). Jesus, the beloved Son of God, was "despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:3-5). "Sometimes they strew His way And His sweet praises sing; Resounding all the day Hosannas to their King. Then 'Crucify!' Is all their breath, And for His death they thirst and cry" (*LSB* 430:3).

Jesus, the beloved Son of God, died on Calvary's cross because He was rejected by His own people. His crime? Being "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." And Jesus cried out from the cross, rejected even by God the Father, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?" Jesus, rejected in our place so that our Father in heaven would receive us as His beloved children, sons and daughters, through the forgiveness of our sins that Christ the beloved Son purchased and won for us with His blood.

Yes Jesus, the rejected Messiah, is truly our Savior. The One of whom Israel's leaders said, "We have no king but Caesar," is indeed Lord of all. The stone that the builders tossed aside as "no good" is now the chief cornerstone. For Jesus, once rejected, is crowned with glory and honor. He is risen from the dead and He is Lord of all. From Philippians 2, "And being found in human form, [Jesus] humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:8-11).

Because of Jesus' rejection and exaltation, you are not rejected by God. By God's amazing love and mercy, your sins and mine are completely forgiven. "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Once you were not a people (when you were rejected because of your sins), but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (through the rejection, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ) (1 Peter 2:9-10).

While we know what it's like to face rejection from other people, thanks to Jesus, we will never know what it is like to be rejected by our heavenly Father. He loves us with an everlasting love in His beloved Son, Jesus Christ (Jer. 31:3). Jesus was rejected for us so that we might receive forgiveness and eternal life as God's gift of inheritance to us. You and I are His children by grace through faith in Him who is the Messiah, our Savior, Jesus Christ—to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.