

Game Changer: Reject Rejection

Mark 6:1-7

I think most of you know how much I love and appreciate you. You have been very kind to me these 30 plus years. But did you know your greatest gift to me was waiting in the pews when I arrived in 1987? Her name was Cyndi Manly. And last week we were celebrating our 30th anniversary. You have been a wonderful home in which to marry and raise our family. Thank you. And if I may say so, that blessing has gone two ways. I think Cyndi Toone has been a wonderful and faithful First Lady to this congregation.

Our getaway was great...but it's always good to come back home. Too bad Jesus couldn't say the same thing. Today we begin a series called "Game-changers;" lessons from Jesus on how to triumph over some of life's most painful experiences. And there's nothing much more painful than rejection, is there?

My teenage years were rough. Not at home; my home life was great. But I had no friends in my high school. So one Friday night, I decided to do something about it: I threw a party. I decorated our basement, covered a table with food and drink, cranked up Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Heart Club Band (that's a Beatles album for you musically deprived souls)... and I waited...and waited...and waited. You know how many came? Not one. Have you ever thrown a party and no one came? It was a crushing rejection.

But years later, it looked like things had turned! I got a call from one of the "cool" kids asking if I would emcee our West Valley five-year reunion. I was shocked but agreed. Finally, this would be my chance to be accepted. But a few days later, I got another call from the same person. "Uh, Mark. Listen, we won't need you to emcee after all. We asked Gordon Sparks and he said yes. And he's funnier. But we still hope you'll come." I did not. Never have. The only reason I might consider going to my fiftieth reunion would be to show off my cute young wife and my reasonably full head of hair.

The fact that you all show up here every weekend to listen...that you find me as funny as Gordon Sparks...is still an amazing gift to me. It's too bad Jesus didn't experience the same welcome from **HIS** people. He had just wrapped up a remarkable chapter of ministry. Powerful teaching, casting out evil spirits, calming storms, healing the sick. And for the grand finale, raising a twelve-year old from the dead! You'd think when Jesus returned home, he would get a ticker tape parade. Well...we'll see. (READ)

[Jesus] went away from there and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. And on the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished, saying, "Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. And Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household." And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. And he marveled at their unbelief.

And he went about among the villages teaching. And he called the twelve and began to send them out two by two

You could hardly pick less impressive town in which to raise a Messiah. Nazareth was a village of MAYBE 500 people and it was the Hicksville of Galilee. It was a nothing town. Never mentioned once in the Old Testament. And except for the gospels, it wouldn't be mentioned in ANY ancient writings for another 200 years. There was nothing remarkable about Nazareth; nothing to be proud of. So you'd THINK that when their hometown boy made a name for himself, it would be a source of great pride; that he would receive a triumphant homecoming. Not quite!

On the Sabbath after Jesus returned, they invited him speak in the synagogue. Here was chance for him to do his thing on his home turf. And at first, they were astonished. (v. 2) Literally the Greek says they were "knocked out." Jesus knocked them out with his teaching. But then they caught themselves....and began to question.

English doesn't capture how rude their questions were. In Greek they refer to Jesus disdainfully as "this guy." "Where did this guy get all this? What is the wisdom that has been given to this guy?" Thousands of others believed in the power and teachings of Jesus. Why not the Nazarenes? BECAUSE HE WAS ONE OF THEM! "Is not *this guy* the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?"

It's sad, really, because their rejection of Jesus was really a rejection of themselves. These poor people had such a lousy self-image, they couldn't believe God could ever do anything special through one of them. I wonder how many times we hold back our own from something great because we need to keep them in their place?

And so, we read that "They took offense at him." Notice the downward progression of their attitude toward Jesus. First they are astonished...THEN they start questioning...and THEN they decide to be offended. The Greek word for "offense" is "*skandalon*." It means "stumbling block." They were scandalized by Jesus! He offended them. They were astonished at his words...but offended at his person. It's no different today. People who claim to be Christians...maybe good Sunday Christians... appreciate the teachings of Jesus. They love his Sermon on the Mount. They love the Lord's Prayer. They love the parables of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son.

It is not the words of Jesus that offend. It is his person. It is when you realize that the man who speaks those words... calls you to bow your knee to him as Lord. THAT is when we are offended. "Who is this guy, Jesus, that he would tell me what to do? Who is this guy Jesus that he would tell me how to treat my wife and my children? Who is this guy, Jesus, that he would tell me how to spend my money? Butt out, Jesus. Mind your own business. Stick to your teachings. But leave me alone."

The bottom line for the Nazarenes was this: they didn't like this new, powerful Jesus. For thirty years, he lived quietly in their midst. Cared for his mother; run his carpentry shop. Biding his time, waiting patiently for his moment. Then it came. He left town and was baptized. The heavens split open, the Spirit descended upon him, and his heavenly Father spoke: "You are my beloved; I am so proud of you." Or put differently, God said, "OK...Son...go get 'em!" And Jesus was launched. Off and running. Preaching, teaching, exorcising, healing. All that pent-up potential ... finally released!

So the Jesus who returned to Nazareth was not the Jesus who left Nazareth. And the people didn't like it. They liked little boy Jesus running through their streets. They liked polite teenage Jesus who built furniture. THAT Jesus they liked. THIS Jesus...this new, powerful, changed, different Jesus...they didn't like at all. They wanted old Jesus back.

My wife didn't come to Christ until her college years. She was invited to a Bible Study, began to study the word, decided it was true and prayed to receive Jesus. And it changed her. So...when she went back home, she was a different person. Cyndi tells me of an encounter with a high school friend, Amy. The more they talked, the more confused Amy became. Finally she said: "You're different!" And it was not a compliment. Amy remembered...and liked...high school party Cyndi. But this was a new Cyndi, one who had been met by and changed by an encounter with Jesus. Amy didn't know what to do with new Cyndi...or whether she wanted to have anything to do with her at all.

You may not want to hear this, but I'm going to tell you anyway: if you have a genuine encounter with Jesus...if his Spirit REALLY saves you, really fills you, really transforms you, you will be a different person. A radically different person. And there will be some from your Nazareth...who don't like the new you. They liked the old you. But this new you...makes them uncomfortable. It shouldn't surprise us; Jesus said we might be hated for his sake. Like Jesus, you might even experience rejection for your faith. So...how do we deal with that? Whether because of your faith or some other reason, what does Jesus teach us about rejecting rejection?

First, Jesus acknowledged his rejection. After the Nazarenes decided they were offended by him, Jesus speaks these bold words: "A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household." He calls it out. Publically. He could have dialed it back. Downplayed this Messiah thing so as to stay in their good graces. But he refused to deny himself. God HAD called him and empowered him and launched him into a new season of his life. To deny that would have been dishonest and unfaithful. He said, "I AM a prophet whether you receive me or not!"

Cyndi WAS a different person because of Jesus. She tells me that her biggest regret about that conversation with Amy is that she did not immediately respond, "Yes, I AM different because God has changed me. I have given my life to Jesus and I am not the girl I was in high school." She felt she had missed an opportunity and came to realize that every time she went home, she felt squeezed back into the old structure, especially with family. Since then, my wife has become a bold witness for Christ!

Jesus acknowledged his rejection for what it was; he called it out. He might have wished things were different; that his hometown crowd would welcome him and be proud of him. But they didn't...and they weren't. Rejection is a painful reality but the first step in dealing with it is naming it! To say to yourself, "OK, the relationship I long for.... I do not have. And despite my best efforts, it is possible that I may NEVER be accepted for who I am. So be it." The moment you can say that is the moment that you begin to regain some control in your own life.

Jesus acknowledged his rejection. And Jesus moved on. He travelled to other villages and invested in his disciples...the ones who DID want a relationship with him. He could have stayed in Nazareth, begging for another chance. Chasing relationships he felt slipping away. Trying HARDER to impress his family and friends. Trying to behave more like the old Jesus they preferred. Instead, he moved on. We have no record that Jesus ever returned to his hometown again. Instead, he invested in relationships with those who welcomed him and wanted what he had to offer.

There is nothing much more pathetic than watching someone grasp for affection or acceptance or affirmation that is being cruelly withheld. It never works. In fact, it usually leads to even greater disdain. Jesus knew when to move on from his rejection.

But...and here's a really important but: Jesus never burned his bridges. Even when we read that Jesus "could do no mighty works" because of their unbelief, Mark goes on to add that "...he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them." A friend of mine said, "That would have been a pretty good day for me!" Jesus

didn't burn his bridges. Most of the 500 Nazarenes found him offensive. But there were some...who needed him. Who wanted him. And he was there for them.

And later in the Acts 1, we read this cryptic verse: "All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers." Jesus didn't burn his bridges; he left the door open even for those who rejected him. Even his brothers. There's a book in the New Testament called Jude. Do you know wrote it? Judas...the brother of Jesus. And do you know who ended the leader of the Church in Jerusalem. James...the brother of Jesus. In fact, James was beheaded for his faith in Jesus. The one who had found Jesus to be a stumbling block... ended his life on the chopping block for the sake of that same Jesus.

Jesus never burned his bridges and, in the end, some perhaps who had wounded him most deeply... returned to him. There is always hope for reconciliation; you never know what God might do if you move on bravely... but leave your bridges unburned.

But there is one thing more that Jesus understood deeply...that helped him reject rejection. He knew without a doubt that he was the beloved child of his heavenly father, precious in his eyes, called to his work, blessed by his Spirit. We only hear the voice of God twice in Mark's gospel. And both times, God speaks for Jesus to hear: "You are my beloved son. You are my beloved son. You are my beloved son."

How did Jesus...how does anyone...deal with rejection by those closest to them? In the end...the most important thing is to remember this: God loves you...even when others do not. God calls you even when others ignore YOUR call. God welcomes you even when others pretend they are not home. You are the precious and treasured child of Almighty God. He thinks you are cool...whatever those losers from your reunion committee might think...God thinks you are cool. So...who are you going to believe?