

In three week's time, we will gather together to remember, enter into, and celebrate Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday—the death and resurrection of Jesus stands at the centre of our faith. For the next three weekends, we are going to fix our attention on the cross, coming back to the *Sermon On The Mount* after Easter weekend.

The prophet Isaiah, inspired by God, wrote down the following words about a suffering servant who would come to save Israel. “*Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.*”

As those first disciples of Jesus reflected on this Scripture—in light of the life, death, and resurrection of their Master—they concluded that Isaiah was talking about the One they had been following, about Jesus of Nazareth. He was more than a teacher, more than a prophet, more than a holy man—He was God in the flesh. They concluded that when Jesus went to the cross, He took upon Himself not only the sins of humanity, but humanity's pain, suffering, and sickness as well.

And so Jesus' death, as terrible as it was, is redemptive in nature. As the author Stephen Seamands puts it, Jesus' wounds are “wounds that heal.”¹ The cross is the place of both woundedness and healing. It is as the hymn writer suggests,

*The wrongs we have done [our sin]
And the wrongs done to us [our suffering]*

*Were nailed there with Him
There on the cross.*

Between now and Resurrection Sunday we have 4 preaching points and each week I'm going to address a different wound that Jesus suffered with us and for us—my prayer is that as you bring these hurts to the cross, you will find acceptance, restoration, and hope.

illus: This morning I'm going to address the wound of **rejection**, and I want to begin by sharing a part of my story. Between the ages of 16 and 19, I was in a committed dating relationship with a girl from my church. We both came from families that followed Jesus, we were both involved in the church (attending, giving, serving), we had similar backgrounds, likes and dislikes. But if I had to characterize our relationship I might describe it in terms of having two faces—one was cheerful, fun, and full of life, while the other was wounded and emotionally unhealthy.

My girlfriend grew up in a home that was unpredictable and unsafe. Her mother could be the life of the party—laughing, smiling, and loving—and then swing in the opposite direction at a moment's notice. It wasn't something their family talked about, and nothing was ever diagnosed, but everyone developed strategies to avoid and to cope whenever trouble reared its head in the home. I suspect the reason my girlfriend connected so deeply with my mom, was that she was safe and loving in a way her mom was not.

¹ Stephen Seamands, *Wounds That Heal: Bringing Our Hurts To The Cross*.

It wasn't until many years later that I began to understand the woundedness she carried with her—unprocessed pain has a way of festering and causing infection at a heart level. And whatever we ignore—pushing down into the dark crevasses of our soul—will eventually come out, often with destructive force.

One of the ways she dealt with the rejection she experienced from her mom was to make light of everything and everyone. Whatever she could pick at, laugh at, or mock, she would—and I was a regular target. It was often something small: my teeth were too crooked, my legs were too skinny, or my muscles too small. Why couldn't I be as funny as our friend, as creative as so and so, and as tall, dark, and handsome as her sister's friend.

I told myself it didn't bother me, it was all in good fun, besides, she's probably just having a hard time with her mom. I took all of those words she spoke, the feelings of inadequacy they produced, my hurts and my anger, and I buried them in the crevasse of my own soul—but crevasses have a way of filling up and spilling over.

One day the two of us were talking on the phone and we got into a disagreement—I don't remember what it was about, but I do remember how our conversation ended; she hung up on me mid-sentence. I couldn't believe it! This was before the day of cell phones dropping calls—it was deliberate, and I was furious. I hit redial as fast as I could and she picked up and promptly hung up without saying a word.

I jumped in my car and drove over to her house, seething with anger. She opened the door, I walked in, and I unloaded 3 years of bitterness. What I said to her was an accurate reflection of how I felt,

but it was unfair to do it in the manner in which I did. After about 15 minutes of me monologuing—and my girlfriend not saying a word—she got up to leave the room. And when I asked her, “*Aren't you going to respond to anything I've just said?*,” she responded by laughing in my face and walking out.

I followed her out of the room, and said, “*That's it...we're finished, it's over.*” I got in my car, drove home, went straight to my bedroom, and closed the door. And I can remember saying to myself, “*I will never let anyone hurt me like that again.*”

Perhaps you're familiar with the following English Nursery Rhyme: *sticks and stones may break my bones but words (names) will never hurt me*. Whoever penned these words was either incredibly naive, or a liar. Broken bones heal, but the results of rejection do not mend on their own—many of you can call to mind specific words that were spoken decades ago.

One dictionary defines rejection in the following way: “to discard, to throw away as worthless, useless, or defective”.

The Rejection We Encounter

Have you ever applied for a job and heard a resounding “no”? Perhaps you've tried out for a school team, drama, band or choir and haven't quite made the cut. “*That's life,*” we tell ourselves, but we can't brush aside the thought that perhaps there's something wrong with us, that somehow, we're not quite enough.

Maybe you work in the area of sales and you've come to expect more “rejection” than not. If you work for a large corporation, you've

likely experienced a major down-sizing effort; perhaps you've been told that your job has become "redundant." I wonder, have we become so calloused to this practice that we no longer pause to consider the ramifications to the soul. To be redundant is to be unnecessary. And I suspect that while we may be told that our job has become unnecessary, what we hear is that we are unnecessary—feelings of rejection quickly follow. *Rejection has many faces.*

illus: Guys, have you ever approached a girl to ask her out on a date? It can be terrifying, and at times it seems that the risk outweighs the reward. Every time you ask, you open yourself to the pain of rejection.

I can remember inviting Naomi's parents out for breakfast, to ask for her hand in marriage. Her parents are sharp people—I didn't tell them why I wanted to go for breakfast, or why Naomi wouldn't be joining us, but they knew. I was relatively certain that they would say "yes," but that didn't stop me from fear and trembling—the fear of rejection was palpable. What if they said "no"? What if they told me that I wasn't good enough for their daughter? How would I live with those words?

Maybe your offer to help has been pushed aside by a friend. Maybe you grew up in a home where one of your siblings demanded so much attention that you never felt like you were really seen, heard, or cherished. Perhaps you had a group of friends that decided to "move on," and their new circle didn't include you

Maybe you were adopted as a small child—and while your adoptive parents may be the most wonderful people in the world—you can help but wonder: *why didn't my birth parents want me? Why didn't they keep me?*

Maybe your parent or spouse is consumed with their work and you feel abandoned and neglected. Maybe your spouse is so invested in your children—you feel replaced, shut out, unnecessary. Perhaps your spouse told you that they no longer love you as they once did—they didn't just leave you, they destroyed you at the level of your being, and then walked out the door. *Rejection has many faces.*

The question is, *why does the wound of rejection, wound us so deeply?* To answer this, we need to understand who we are and what we've been made for. Genesis 1:26-27 reminds us that we have been made in God's image, and at least in part, that means that we have been made for relationship. In history, and throughout Scripture, God has revealed Himself as being both one and yet three. Before the creation of the world, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have been in relationship; this fact is essential to God's being, and in turn to ours.

Seamands writes, "Relationships...are essential to human personhood. We cannot be persons apart from our connection to others. This explains why wounds of rejection cut so deeply—it hits us at the level of being and identity; it strikes at our connection to others."² God has made us for acceptance, and when we experience the opposite—rejection—it can destroy our sense of self, our worth, and our ability to relate to others in a healthy way.

² Seamands, 29.

You received a card this morning when you walked in, on it, you will see the word “rejection”—I want to invite you to take a moment now and write down a wound of rejection that you haven’t quite recovered from; it can be small or big. I’ll call us back together in a moment or two.

This morning I want you to know that you are not alone—Jesus knows the wound of rejection.

The Rejection Jesus Encountered

Isaiah 53:3 says, “*He was despised and **rejected** by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces, he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.*” We aren’t told when Jesus first experienced the wound of rejection, but we do know that it followed Him as soon as He began itinerant ministry.

When Jesus first began to attract the crowds, teaching and healing, His family rejected His calling; we’re told that they “went to take charge of Him, for they said ‘*He is out of His mind.*’ (Mark 3:20)” When Jesus returned to His home town to teach and heal, the whole town took offence at Him. Luke 4:29 says that “*They got up, drove [Jesus] out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill...in order to throw him off the cliff.*” That’s rejection of the most extreme kind.

Jesus was also rejected by religious leaders for not following their traditions. When they saw that they couldn’t control or intimidate Jesus, they decided to silence Him and began to plot His death. But

they didn’t work alone, Jesus experienced the rejection of betrayal from His own inner circle. For 3 years Jesus had mentored Judas, and yet Judas sold Him out for a few pieces of silver (Mt.26:14-16).

What about the rejection of neglect? On the night He was betrayed, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus said to His disciples, “*My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me*”. But they couldn’t do it; they fell asleep on Him (Mt. 26:38, 40). Perhaps you’ve experienced this same rejection. “Close friends who promise to be faithful but are so preoccupied...they fail you when you need them most.”³ Jesus knows this pain.

Or how about the rejection of disloyalty? All 12 disciples swore to follow Jesus to the end. In fact, Peter said, “*Even if all fall away, I will not...Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.* (Mk. 14:27-31)” But you know the story, when Jesus was arrested, His disciples abandoned Him, and Peter denied ever knowing Jesus (Lk. 22:56-22).

Jesus was rejected by the High Priest in a farce of a trial (Mt. 26:57-68), and not long after He was rejected by the crowds. When Pilate, the Roman Governor, asked them, “*What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the Messiah?*,” They all answered, “*Crucify him!* (Mt. 27:22)”

The soldiers who carried out Jesus’ execution rejected Him in word and deed: they put a royal robe on Jesus, twisted a crown of thorns and placed it on His head, they put a staff in his right hand, knelt in front of him and mockingly said, “*Hail, king of the Jews!*” Then they

³ Seamands, 31.

took the staff and struck him on the head again and again (Mt. 27:28-31).

Even as Jesus hung on the cross, dying a horrible death, people walked by hurling insults: “ *He saved others...but he can't save himself! He's the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him...if He wants him* (Mt. 27:42-43)”.

Bring Your Wounds To Jesus

Jesus understands rejection firsthand—He bears on His body the wounds caused by others. I want to invite you to bring your wounds of rejection to Him. Seamands writes, “Remember what has happened to you in light of what has happened to Him.”⁴ He is a fellow sufferer who understands.

But as Isaiah reminds us, Jesus does more than identify with our wounds of rejection; in a mysterious way, Jesus took up our pain and bore our wounds of rejection when He hung on the cross. You are not alone in your suffering, the perfect Son of God suffered with you and for you.

Can you hear Him calling to you this morning? “*Come to Me. The rejection you've carried for years, I bore on my body at the cross. Give Me all the painful “no's,” the “you're not good enough's,” and the “I don't love you's.” Give Me your memories of abandonment, disloyalty, betrayal, and abuse—let me bear these wounds for you.*”

A few minutes ago, many of you wrote something down on the card we provided—what you wrote down wasn't for God, it was for you. Jesus knows what you've endured, He has bore your wounds on His own body—and His wounds are wounds that can heal.

A Word About Healing

This morning I would like to speak a few words about the healing Jesus offers—*where does it begin?* I believe this healing begins with a reordering of our minds, and, an encounter with God's love.

At the cross, God's perspective is made plain. Romans 5:8 says “*God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*” The question of your worth and value was settled once and for all at the cross. Others may have discarded you, and thrown you away as worthless, useless, or defective, but at the cross, God has spoken the final word—*because of Jesus, you are accepted, you've been chosen, you belong in His family.*

No matter what others have said about you, God's mind has been made up. You are loved. You are significant. You are of infinite worth. No rejection, no matter how great, can ever change this. When we look to the cross, these truths ring loud and clear.

Healing from the wound of rejection begins when we filter our opinions, and the opinions of others, through the lens of the cross. And as we spend time with Jesus, praying, listening, reading the Gospel accounts, our heart begins to believe that His words might actually be true. Knowing you are loved by God and experiencing

⁴ Seamands, 37.

this love is key to our healing—we can walk away from the wounds of rejection, precisely because we are walking in His acceptance.

Before I talk about how this healing unfolds in our lives, I want to address a common misunderstanding of the scope of Jesus' healing. When we talk about Jesus healing emotional pain, some might get the impression that Jesus will pain-proof their life.

Yes, our wounds can be healed. Jesus does lead us into a measure of peace and restoration, but His healing will not make us impervious to pain—Jesus lived perfectly within the love of God the Father, and yet He still experienced the pain of rejection.

Knowing that you are loved by God is not a bullet-proof vest—the rejection of a colleague, a classmate, a friend, or family member will still hurt. But, when we live in the love of God, it changes how we respond to these wounds—they no longer need to define us; we no longer bear them alone.

Let me talk for a moment about the nature of emotional healing—*does it happen in a moment, or does it happen over time?*

It's a difficult question to answer because when it comes to healing, we are dealing with God. It's never wise to say, "*God only does this,*" or, "*God never does that.*" God is God, I am not, and He doesn't consult me when it comes to when, or how, He determines to heal. When it comes to emotional healing, one might experience healing that happens in an instant. God can do that. However, my own personal experience, and pastoral experience would seem to suggest that deep wounds like rejection, require a journey of healing.

illus: To use the analogy of construction, Jesus the Master Builder (and healer) needs to strip the house down to the foundation, in order to rebuild the house again.

When Jesus offers healing, He's offering to address our painful memories and feelings, to address the lies we've come to believe about ourselves and others; He's offering to dismantle the self-protection strategies we've built up in response to rejection, and, to give us the courage to be vulnerable and trust others again.

Many of us miss out on the healing Jesus offers simply because we are looking for a quicker, pain-free fix. Becoming whole takes time. Becoming whole takes work—His, and ours. When Jesus offers us healing from rejection, what He's really offering is Himself—healing comes as we seek Jesus for our wholeness.

In life we will experience the wounds of rejection, shame, and disappointment, but we need not experience them alone—Jesus bore them with us and for us on the cross. And because of His resurrection, we can exchange rejection for acceptance, shame for honour, and disappointment for hope. Over the next three weeks, my prayer is that as you encounter the living Jesus, you will encounter His healing.

As I conclude, I want to invite a friend of mine to come and join me on stage, Sherri Koop—with her help I want to give you a creative assignment over the next 3 weeks. As we talk about the exchange of rejection for acceptance, shame for honour, and disappointment for hope, we would like to invite you to capture these things by way of picture. Sherri, why don't you explain further?

Conclusion: Jesus' wounds are "wounds that heal." Come to Him—bring your hurts to the cross. Give Jesus your memories of abandonment, disloyalty, betrayal, and abuse—let Jesus bear these wounds for you. Exchange rejection for His acceptance.

Worship Response: I've asked Alana and her team to conclude our service with a song—it's an invitation by Jesus entitled "*Come To Me*." As they sing, let me invite you to remain seated, to listen, to pray, to bring your wounds of rejection to Jesus—He will bear your wounds.

Prayer/Benediction