

Misfits Who Fit*

Acts 4:5-13

Fourth Sunday of Lent, (March 11) 2018

Kyle Childress

Have you ever been the last person chosen when you were in elementary school for some game at recess or P.E.? Two team captains take turns choosing from a group of kids lined up along the fence until it comes down to two or three or four. I remember a team captain saying to some of us who were left, “We don’t care whose team you’re on. It doesn’t matter.”

That comment, “We don’t care whose team you’re on” can define a person’s life, especially if it happened time and time again. And the dismissive “It doesn’t matter,” is another matter of saying, “You don’t matter.” It’s another way of saying, “You’re not important. We cast you aside. We reject you.” Many of us here have experienced a sense of being rejected in significant ways beyond not being chosen for the baseball team: family abuse, deep poverty, family dysfunction, drug and alcohol addiction, or “too old” or “too fat” or “wrong color” or “wrong gender” or “gay” or “wrong citizenship,” or “an obsolete worker,” or “a trouble-maker” or “thinks too much outside the box” or “asks too many questions” or maybe just plain “too different.” You get the idea.

What often happens for those of us who’ve experienced such a sense of rejection is that we have two choices: either we fight it or we accept it. We fight it and over time, we risk becoming an angry person who is combative. Or we accept it and become someone who assumes we truly deserve our rejection. Most of the

time, we end up assuming both choices. We both fight it and are angry and combative and we accept it and assume that deep down we deserve the rejection.

A friend of mine had a church member tell him once, “You know, we’re a bunch of misfits who somehow fit together.” That’s a description that I think fits us. We’re a bunch of misfits who somehow fit together. Rather than fight the label of misfit or simply knuckle under to it, what I’m suggesting is that we go with it and allow God to transform it. In Christ, God reframes it.

Often we describe ourselves as an inclusive church but maybe inclusive is not the best description. Inclusive seems to imply that some who are core member have it together and are normal and healthy and privileged and we open the doors to those who are not. The truth is we’re all a bunch of misfits somehow or another and we have been since our founding 50 years ago. But because of Christ we fit together. To use language more familiar, we are all lost sheep who have been found by the Good Shepherd.

In our scripture reading from Acts, Peter and John have been in jail overnight because they healed a man the day before, and they have been hauled before the Sanhedrin, the Religious/Political Leadership of Jerusalem, to answer for their crime. Peter, full of the Holy Spirit, begins to preach, saying that it was by the power of the living Jesus Christ of Nazareth that the man was healed. This same Jesus, the very person you leaders executed on a cross, God raised from the dead. “The stone you builders rejected; has become the cornerstone” (Acts 4:11).

Here were Peter and John, both considered rejects because they had no proper education, accreditation, or recognized authority, boldly and eloquently

speaking to the Powers-that-Be and to the crowd of onlookers, of Jesus of Nazareth, another rejected person. Indeed, this Jesus fellow was one the Powers had killed not 2 months before. Who did these guys think they were?

I'll tell you who they were. Peter and John were part of a long line of people throughout the Bible, who, like Jesus, had been stones the builders rejected. The Bible was written by those considered as rejects and they knew what it felt like to be rejected.

Congregations tend to emphasize how strong and influential we are. We want to attract the powerful and beautiful people. But Jesus was the stone the builders rejected and those people whom he called to be with him were also stones the builders rejected. The good news is that it is often those who feel rejection who are most aware that we need the living Holy Spirit in our lives. We know we cannot do this on our own. We are open to God working in us and through us. People with power usually do not think they need God. They have no room for the Holy Spirit. We do.

Peter says that Jesus, the stone the builders rejected, became the *cornerstone*, the keystone – the stone that holds all of the other stones together. The cornerstone or the keystone is the one vital connection, the crucial link holding everything together.

This is the church – a bunch of rejected misfits, who because of Christ being the keystone, we all fit together. Look at Simon Peter. Several months before Simon was given the new name of Peter/Petros which means Rock or Stone. He was no stone a couple of months before when he rejected Christ on the night Jesus

was tried and executed. But now, by the grace of God and by the power of the Holy Spirit, he has become the very Rock Christ foretold. And in so doing, Christ made him a cornerstone. The church is founded upon and comprised of stones the builders rejected but become cornerstones.

Part of being the church is learning to see Jesus in the face of each other and seeing that we very ones who have been rejected have become the very building stones of the church.

We baptized Peggy Greer and Jada Sanchez this morning. Peggy was baptized as an 8 year-old in Smyrna Baptist Church in Timpson. But when she stepped into the baptistry, she noticed a dead bird floating in the water. She felt that it was a bad omen and has never felt good about it since. Many of us know her story and a lot about her life. There have been times, especially when she was a child, when she had a strong sense of being rejected. But our testimony is that Peggy Greer is a cornerstone of the church of Jesus Christ who goes by the name of Austin Heights Baptist Church. And Jana Sanchez is now a cornerstone.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. One True God, Mother of us all. Amen.

*Thanks to Sam Wells, *Incarnation as Mission: Being With the World*, pp. 36-42 for the basic content for this sermon.