JESUS KNOWS WHAT YOU ARE GOING THROUGH

1. He was rejected for his teaching
2. He was dishonored by his family

I always enjoyed the TV show M*A*S*H - when it was first on as well as its reruns. As I studied the portion of God's Word before us today, I thought of one episode. In it, a soldier receives a terrible leg wound. The damage is so great that his leg has to be amputated. This particular soldier also happens to be a star running back for the U of Iowa football team. When he finds out his leg is gone and his football career over, he does not think life is worth living any more. In one scene Hawkeye tells him: I know how you feel. The soldier angrily replies: No you don't! You can't possibly know! He was right. Hawkeye was a surgeon. He did many amputations, but he never lost a leg self. He could sympathize with that soldier, but he could not empathize with him. He did not really know what that soldier was going through.

Of course, that is fiction. But the idea it conveys is true. Someone who has not experienced what we have experienced just does not know what we are going through. Jesus does. He knows all too well what we, his followers, are going through each and every day. He knows what it is like to be rejected for what you believe, teach and confess. He knows what it is like to be looked down on by his own family.

Jesus had just performed an astounding miracle. He raised a little girl from the dead. After that miracle, Jesus and his disciples traveled to his hometown of Nazareth. On the Sabbath, they went to church - the synagogue. The synagogue service was not all that different from our worship services. They prayed, sang hymns, listened to Scripture readings, and they heard a sermon. The sermon, just like ours, was based on a text from the Scriptures. Unlike our custom it was not preached by the local pastor but by a guest rabbi. Since he was now over 30 years old Jesus could be called rabbi. So on this day his hometown synagogue invited him to be the guest preacher.

We would expect this to have been a joyful homecoming. You can almost read the headline in the Nazareth News: Local Boy Makes Good. Sadly, the people of Jesus' hometown did not exactly welcome him with open arms. After the service there was no Nice to have you back or Thanks for your message. There was nothing but questions: Where did this man learn these things? What is this wisdom that has been given to this man? How is it that miracles such as these are performed by his hands? Isn’t this the carpenter, the son of Mary and the brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And aren’t his sisters here with us? And they took offense at him.

There is an old saying: Familiarity breeds contempt. We are reminded of John’s words in the first chapter of his Gospel: He came to what was his own, yet his own people did not accept him. The worshipers on that Sabbath knew Jesus as their former neighbor. They knew him as the son of Mary. They knew him as the carpenter. Perhaps they even owned furniture he’d made. They could accept all these things. But they refused to accept his teaching. Even his miracles could not convince them that Jesus was who he claimed to be - the promised Messiah. That was most certainly the message of his synagogue sermon.

Jesus was rejected in Nazareth another time. This was what he preached: The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. That passage from Isaiah is about the promised Messiah. After reading it Jesus said: Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. Jesus read the text and then announced the theme: I
am the one Isaiah was talking about. I am the promised Savior of the world. The people rejected his message that time too. In fact, they even tried to throw him off a cliff.

None of us have ever been pushed to the edge of a cliff because of our Christian confession. That is a good thing - unless it is because we Christians are not always doing a very good job of confessing. Sometimes we are not rejected for our religion because people do not see any religion to reject.

Here is what I mean: Do our words always make clear that we are followers of Jesus, or would they sometimes be more appropriate for dirty joke time at work? Does the way we spend our money make clear that Jesus and his gospel are priority #1, or do we sometimes spend so much on toys and recreation that Jesus gets only our meager leftovers? Do our neighbors see us faithfully leaving for church on Thursday evening or Sunday morning, or do they see us packing up for the lake or the campground every weekend? Do we seize every opportunity to share the truth with others, or do we normally avoid that uncomfortable situation as if to say: Whatever you believe is fine – I don’t want to bother you? Are the Bibles on the coffee table and the cross on the kitchen wall just show pieces, or do they really reflect the faith in our hearts? You know, sometimes people reject Jesus and his message because they cannot stomach his followers. Paul said: Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Sometimes we do just the opposite. Sometimes our lives do not draw people to the Savior. They drive them away.

Jesus knows what we are going through. I do not mean Jesus knows what it is to sin - he never did. But he knows what it is to be tempted. The Bible tells us: We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin. There is the difference. Jesus never sinned. And what a wonderful difference this makes for us. In that synagogue Jesus proclaimed himself as the promised Savior and that is what he is. Jesus is our perfect substitute. He never failed to glorify God in all that he did. He obeyed perfectly in our place. He was without sin. But this Sinless One allowed himself to be numbered with us sinners. He allowed himself to be hammered to a cross and sealed in a tomb because of our offenses against God. His divine blood paid for every one. And his resurrection put the exclamation point on his words: It is finished. Our enemy is defeated. Our sin is forgiven. Our eternity is secure.

It was for this message that the hometown Nazareth crowd rejected Jesus. My friends, when we are rejected for our faith, Jesus knows just how we feel. And he knows how to help. He gives us this promise: Surely I am with you always until the end of the age. Through his Word and Supper Jesus is with us to strengthen our faith and empower our witness in a sin-darkened world. Yes, we will be rejected and dishonored for our Christian faith. But we will never face this rejection alone.

But you know, there is one kind of rejection that hurts more than most - being rejected by your own family.

Seven centuries before Jesus’ birth, Isaiah wrote about him: He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. That is a good little summary of the kind of life Jesus lived. It was not a life of popularity. It was a life of rejection.

One of the greatest sorrows of Jesus’ life was being rejected by his brothers and sisters - his own family. Yes, Jesus had brothers and sisters. They were probably the biological children of Mary and Joe, born after Jesus’ virgin birth. Well, these half-brothers and sisters thought Jesus was crazy. He is out of his mind, they once said about him. John tells us that even his own brothers did not believe in him. How sad!
But later on, after Jesus’ resurrection, things changed. In 1 Corinthians his brothers are mentioned prominently in a list of other believers. And in Galatians, Paul tells us that his brother James became a great pillar of the church in Jerusalem.

My friends, this is encouraging. Families are often split into two groups: believers and unbelievers. Most of us have family members who are not Christian or who are weak in their faith. They often reject us for our Christian faith and our Christian way of life. When you speak against a brother’s immoral lifestyle or a sister’s lack of church attendance or a son’s abuse of alcohol, you can suddenly become pretty unpopular. You begin to receive the blame for the family not getting along. Someone might even say: Who do you think you are, Mr. Perfect? You are just as bad as the rest of us.

But do not give up hope. Jesus’ family rejected him at first too. Later they put their trust in him as their only Savior. The same can happen in your family. So keep on proclaiming the Word. Keep speaking God’s law and gospel. Keep on telling your family about the Savior. Keep on sharing the good news. The book of Romans tells us that Gospel is the power of God for salvation. Your brother may reject God’s Word and tell you to quit preaching to him. But you never know when the Spirit is going to use that message to change his heart and bring him to repentance and faith. What a happy occasion it is when a wandering soul returns to the Lord! Jesus put it this way: In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. For us the joy is multiplied when that repentant sinner is a member of our own family.

I know how you feel. That is annoying when the person saying does not really know what you are going through. But when it comes from our Savior’s heart, what a comfort! Jesus really does know what we are going through. And the one who has been there and done that, promises to be with us always. Amen.

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