

August 21, 2022
The Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost
Pastor Matt Duerr

Rejected!

Grace and Peace, from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen. Last week we had part one of our ironic sermons dealing with some of the great hymns that we sing. Last week we saw that “Onward Christian Soldiers” was not written as a great patriotic hymn. Ironically, it was a children’s song inviting children to come and march in a parade with them. Today, we have part two of the ironic hymns or ironic sermons.

I'd like to introduce you to Isaac watts and Lowell Mason. These two individuals never met in life. In fact, Lowell Mason was born 42 years after Isaac Watts died. But both of them were religious Christian revolutionaries; both of them suffered a common plague that I think probably all of us have experienced in this sin marred world. It's a plague called rejection. Have you ever been rejected, or experienced rejection? It hurts and it can take many forms. In the news today, in the spotlight is societal rejection; which has led to the LGBTQ plus movement and a major focus on race and many other things. But rejection can also take place in the family. It comes from a point where the person who feels rejected, feels like everything they've done has been ignored.

I remember in my senior year in college I made a mistake. I won't go into great details, but I blew up a toilet. I did this, again in my senior year. I did this after having paid for my entire way through college up to that point. I also paid all of my bills when it came to my food. I paid all of my bills when it came to my car, my car insurance, and all of that. I paid for all of my college books and I had just finished paying for my books, my tuition, my room, all of that. And I blew up the toilet and I had to pay for its replacement, and I didn't have any money. I called my dad, and his response was ‘eat your speakers.’ I had bought some stereo speakers over a year before with money I had earned, but he didn't think it was a wise choice. I felt rejected. It's like, ‘gee, come on I have an older brother, older sister, you paid a large portion of their college education. You told me when I was in 8th grade that I was going to need to get a job because you wouldn't be able to help me financially in college and I've lived up to that all the way to my senior year.’ Rejection, it hurt!

Rejection can take place in the workforce and I'm not talking here about the societal stuff creeping its way in. Again, I remember working for a landscaper and this person we worked for had an idea of how she wanted things to be but she kept changing and she wanted a waterfall 8 feet high, dropping into a pond with water

rerouted from Bishop Creek to this pond. We did that! It was beautiful. When she came out, she looked at it and went, 'no you know, 8 feet in height, that isn't high enough. I think I want 12. It just sunk my boat.

And then again there is rejection within the church. I know many a pastor, church worker, Christian teacher, who has left the ministry because those they were called to serve, we're so unbelievably critical of anything they did, and they felt like they could just never ever get anything right.

This whole business of rejection has led many people to write books and all sorts of scientific, psychiatric study on it. Some of those books that are way up on the list today are Social Rejection and Suicidal Intention or Suicide the Ultimate Rejection. Because rejection plays the largest role there is in suicide; and they are finding, in mass shootings.

Lowell Mason is an individual who was very familiar with rejection. Born in 1792, in Orange, New Jersey, he was a very bright individual. He was so bright that as a teenager he was the one who was directing the church choir. Needless to say, he was musically gifted, but he realized very soon he couldn't make a living following his passion for music because his passion for music involved a style that was rejected.

So, he became a banker, but he continued music as his hobby. It was greatly influenced by the musician, Handel and as a result Handel's style of music greatly influenced what he wrote. And he compiled and list of songs that he wrote, melodies that he wrote, and he sent them to a publisher in Boston and they just flatly rejected it saying, and I quote, "America wants new folk songs." They weren't interested in classical styles of music. And so, he quit his hobby, quit writing music, quit doing that stuff. He became a Sunday school teacher and an organist because as an organist, he could play the classic tunes. And oh, how I wish the church was filled with such quitters today!

For 15 years, he served as a banker, a Sunday school teacher, and organist in his church when he was contacted by the Handel and Haydn Society of Massachusetts, which had evidently bought out the publisher he had submitted his book of tunes to; and they wanted permission to publish 50,000 copies. He moved Boston as a result. He is responsible for the first public school music program in Boston. He wrote over 600 classical hymn melodies, eight of them are in our Lutheran Service Book. All three of the hymns we sing today are written by him. He was greatly inspired by Handel. As I said, and as he was studying Handel's Messiah he thought; "I need to write something. I need to write something that's exuberant, that's uplifting." And he did, he wrote this melody that was very

exuberant. And he named it Antioch because he had been studying the book of Acts and he saw how Paul and Barnabas began on their first two missionary trips from that city called Antioch. And this was exciting because the gospel message was reaching out into the world and this needed to have an uplifting melody, but he couldn't find the words that would fit.

Three years later he found a poem in a book. It was titled The Modern Psalmist. It was written by a gentleman named Isaac Watts, who by the way, has 15 hymns in the Lutheran Service Book. So, he wins in that category. But no, he wasn't a great man, he was a rejected man kind of like Lowell Mason. He was born July 17th, 1674, in Southampton, England. When he was born, his father was in prison. Why? Because he was a rejected man. He had nonconforming ideas that were not accepted by the Church of England at that time; nor was it accepted by the established scholars of that time. Can you say, 'cancel culture?' Remember here of our sermon a couple weeks ago, there's nothing new under the sun. People are always getting cancelled when they don't conform.

But he also was bright. By the age of 20, he had mastered the Greek, the Hebrew, and the Latin languages. Now he was in England, but he did not attend Cambridge, or Oxford. No, he was rejected by both because he wasn't a member at the Church of England. Instead, he went to church at the "Above Bar Congregational Church" and it was called that because they met above a bar. Why did he join that church? Because instead of blind acceptance of what was being taught, he asked a question, the same question his father would ask. Why do you believe what you believe and why are teaching us? Why do you do what you do within the church? Why do you sing what we sing? For that matter why don't we sing it in English instead of Latin? Or why should we sing in old English when we've got new English?

And as he was asking these questions, his father put forth a challenge to him; "come up with something better." And he did. He wrote over 600 hymns. At the age of 26, he became the head minister in his church, and he began to do something a little radical. He based his sermons on the scripture translating the Greek and the Hebrew into English and then teaching from that. He preached the Word, and he wrote uplifting poems and hymns, and he was a well-known cleric in England.

He was so well-known and so well-idolized that he caught the attention of a young lady named Elizabeth Singer who was deeply impressed by his level of teaching and understanding and so she wrote to him they became pen pals. She was his biggest fan. Such a big fan that she, please remember this is in the 1700s) she proposed to him! And he accepted that proposal and when she received that mail saying, 'yes I will marry you,' she immediately rushed to meet him, to stand by him,

to be in ministry together with him. And when she arrived, and she saw him, she immediately got back in the carriage and left. Why? Let me share her words, I quote, “he was only 5 foot tall, with a shallow face, and a hooked nose, prominent cheekbones, small eyes, and a death like color.” She then concluded by saying, I quote; “I was unable to look at him.” End quote.

Now, how is that for rejection? And what did Isaac Watts do? How did he respond at such a horrible time? He went back to work! If you open the Bible to Psalm 98, the one we used in our introit this morning, “Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the world.” And he wrote a poem, a four-verse poem based on Psalm 98. He titled it “Joy to the world.” He sent it to the tune of “Come thou fount of every blessing.” He himself rejected by Elizabeth Singer, was also rejected by the Church of England because he dared to preach and teach in English.

And so, his poem was never really published until it was found by Lowell Mason who was born 42 years after his death. Lowell Mason put it to his tune. It's a hymn written out of rejection, both the lyrics and the tune. By the way, also our sermon hymn by both of these guys rejected. But in the case of Joy to the World. If we fast forward over 150 years to 1911, Elise Stevenson recorded Joy to the World. It went to #5 on the charts almost immediately, later became the inspiration of a song by Three Dog Night, titled Joy to the World. But today, in 2022 Joy to the World is considered one of the five top Christmas carols of all time. And yet, it wasn't a Christmas Carol. It's a song about rejection. It's a song about how to deal with rejection. When you are rejected, and you're feeling down, you're feeling low, you're feeling suicidal, you're feeling everybody is against you, your family is rejected you, society has rejected you, you never can please your boss.

When you are feeling totally rejected like Isaac Watts and Lowell Mason were feeling, rejoice! The Lord has come. He has come for a world, and I want you to listen very carefully and ponder this. He has come to a world that has rejected Him. And yet what is God's answer to rejection, His rejection by the people He created? This is the God who man rejected and then sent His son to walk among us, to redeem those who were doing the rejecting of Him and to make them His own.

This is why the tune is exuberant. It's a mission song about taking this joy in us to a sin marred world of rejection. And it is words of hope, and of joy, that says; you know how good you are? You're so good in your rejecting God, that God has sent His son to save you from yourself, to make you His own to buy you back. And now that is the exact opposite of rejection. That's called love and that's what Joy to the World is about.

So, you feel rejected, don't read a book like Social Rejection and Suicidal Intention, go to the Bible see God's love for you. Don't call that new suicide prevention hotline. Don't change your gender or your beliefs to try to conform. Don't seek vengeance. Don't contemplate suicide. Stop, look at Him, the Lamb of God and realized that He values you so much that He gave up everything for you. And then in that moment you will probably join in with Lowell Mason and Isaac Watts and people over the last 100 years who can sing; "Joy to the World, the Lord has come, let earth, not reject, but receive her King, prepare for Him, a place in your heart. Make room for Him because He loves you, He saved you and He's given you a purpose. Go and make disciples of all nations and bring glory to Him.

In our Saviors Name, Amen.