

Sermon ✝ March 13, 2022

Luke 13:31-35

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As any of you parents know, there is a great joy in being a parent. It is a singular kind of experience. But, as any of you who are parents also know, it can also be very challenging and frustrating.

When I use the word *frustrating*, I'm thinking about many things. There is the frustration of having a sick infant . . . and because your child cannot yet talk . . . they cannot tell you where it hurts. There is the frustration of sending them off on their first day of school . . . knowing that you cannot be there to protect them. And then there is the frustration of realizing that your children are just like you.

This means that your children may not pay any more attention to your valued advice than you did to your parents.

As one who has made many mistakes in life, I've tried to pass along to our girls the lessons learned from my experiences. In doing so, I would sometimes go off into long, meaningful discourses . . . advising them on a specific issue. They would usually listen politely and then whisper to each other something like, "*Dad's nuts.*"

Our children often reject our counsel. But why shouldn't they . . . we were no different. Since the very beginning of recorded history, people have repeatedly rejected good and wise advice.

The early Israelites did not like what Jeremiah had to say to them. They were ready to kill him on the spot. And Jesus . . . well we all know what happened to him. As we ponder our faith this Lenten season, it might be helpful to consider a few of the ways in which we still reject God.

For one thing, we reject God when our faith becomes one of the "*of course*" values of life. "*Do you believe in God?*" "*Oh sure, of course I do.*" Is the usual response.

But then, when you ask where they worship or inquire as to their denomination, the reply is often, "*Oh we're not members of any organized church, but we are very spiritual.*" The "*of course*" attitude toward faith in God is really no faith at all. It is simply the answer to a question.

Faith in God is not something that can be taken for granted. And God is often rejected by those who assume they know God too easily. Many of us may be guilty of a too-easy faith.

And somewhere along the way, we have been taught by well-meaning Sunday school teachers or pastors, that to doubt or ask faith questions is tantamount to sin. But until you know what

doubt is, you will never truly know what it is to believe. Faith is only possible in a universe where doubt is a live option.

The Bible is filled with warnings addressed to those who assume too easily that they know all about God. "*You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.*" Not simply about cursing. But rather addressed to the pious . . . those who talk about God and mean nothing by it. We take the name of God in vain when we call upon God but do not really mean it.

When God ceases to touch our lives in a vital way, then God is no longer needed or wanted. To know God is not about reciting scripture or regurgitating Biblical facts. To know God is to enter into relationship through faith, love and trust.

Another way that we reject God is when we relegate God to the periphery of life. There is a real sense in which we need to let God be God. And when we do not we miss an opportunity to allow God to be present in our lives.

To love God with "*all our heart and mind and strength*" is to put God at the very center of our existence. In doing so, we affirm God as God. We often reverence God or the things of God . . . but fail to enter into dialogue with God.

We want a God whom we can manipulate. We want to use God rather than to obey. This is why the church kills its prophets or starves them to death. And we do not want anyone to remind us of our duty.

We do not need someone to call us to obedience. We don't need to hear about the sacrifices that we should be making. The church is okay as long as it minds its business and not ours.

A final way that we reject God can even be found in our manner of worship. Is our worship a funeral for a dead God, or is it a celebration of a living, Holy Spirit? Do we just go through the motions? Are we merely mouthing words or do we enter into dialogue with a present, tangible God?

We must also take care lest we do the right things for the wrong reasons. We may worship not to glorify and honor God, but to soothe our own consciences or to make God beholden to us. We may pray and present God with a shopping list of needs rather than asking God to use us for his purposes. We may give to the church so that we "get credit" instead of being concerned about the needs of the church.

One of the reasons that holy communion is so vital to worship is that it gives a perspective to worship which helps us to realize in whose name we come together. Weekly, we gather in the name of the living Lord who is alive for evermore.

A congregation either celebrates the *living-ness* of God or holds a funeral. And, unfortunately, the cross stands as a vivid reminder of how often we continue to say "no" to God.

Just as Jesus was rejected by his own people so long ago, he can still be rejected by us today.

*If* our faith is simply an "of-course" value of life,

*if* we seek to use God instead of obeying God or,

*if* our worship is nothing more than an acknowledgment of the past, rather than a celebration of a living God who is active and present in our lives.

Even though we may reject God, God's love remains.

It is what we call amazing grace.

It is this same grace that enables us to continue to sing God's praises.

And it is in the name of this same God, that we gather this day and we pray. Amen.