

I've told some of you this story before. So stick with me if you've heard it. But I went on this date one time in college with this woman that I met. She had a car and I didn't so I would get an occasional ride to my parent's home with her. Somehow she trusted me enough to do that. Well anyway, we lived in the same town and I invited her out over Christmas of our freshman year. This may shock many of you but I wasn't real experienced when it came to the dating scene. But I invited her out and she agreed. We planned to go out to eat and then to a movie, *Beverly Hills Cop*, I believe. I picked her up and we went to a Chinese buffet in Columbia next to the old Richland Mall. I come to find out later that while I was at the buffet, she ran into her old boyfriend. While I was innocently filling my plate with hot and spicy chicken and egg rolls, she was setting up a future date with the former boyfriend. We ate our meal together and had some pleasant conversation. We finished up and had some extra time to kill before the movie. We ended up in Belk's Department Store. Back before it was modern, southern, style. Well anyway, I thought it would be fun to try to make her laugh. That's what you do on a date right? It backfired. My antics of trying to juggle plates in the fine china area backfired when she ran into a friend from school. Instead of impressing her, I mortified her. After the movie, I took her back to her home hoping that she would invite me in to watch some TV or just hang out and talk. Instead, she quickly closed the screen door in front of me, thanked me for the date, and the door was closed. She then found her younger sister and told her that she would never go out with that guy again. He was too weird. Man, nothing hurts as much as rejection.

Let me share with you another story. This is one from the life of Paul Sherman, an aspiring Hollywood writer. Paul and his friends were driving from Boston to Montreal for yet another bachelor party. His phone vibrated in his pocket and he casually picked it up. He looked at the number; it was a Hollywood number and he didn't recognize it.

Paul asked his friends to quiet down and lower the music. On the other end of the line was a woman. The woman on the other end of the line then said, "Paul, I have Doug Johnson on the line for you." Paul Sherman says that in Hollywood, IMPORTANT people never make the call. That's why they have assistants. Important people are above making phone calls, checking e-mails, ordering food.

Paul's heart skipped a beat when he heard the name Doug Johnson. Doug is a movie producer. Paul had met Doug a few times over the years but once Doug became important, he started to ignore Paul. Paul had sent him a script and it appeared that now was his big break.

Doug Johnson then says: *Sherman, what's up dude?! Your script is killing, man.*

Paul says he could barely muster up a word. He had been waiting for this call his entire life.

Doug Johnson continued: *Everyone wants to be attached to this thing. How was the meeting with Jack Black and those producers?*

Paul's heart dropped. *Nobody ever told him about the meeting.*

Doug Johnson responded: *Sherman...stop joking around.*

Paul pleaded. *Man, Doug, nobody told me. But I'm sure we can work something out.*

Doug Johnson was furious. *You missed the Jack Black meeting? Are you serious?*

Paul tried to reassure him. *It's OK. I'll fly out today. Anything you want.*

But then Doug Johnson said: *Come on DAN...stop being an idiot.*

DAN??? Paul's heart froze. His jaw dropped. Paul felt nauseous.

*Dan? This is PAUL.*

Doug then shouts at his assistant: *GLORIA! You called the WRONG Sherman. I wanted Dan Sherman. Not some guy named Paul Sherman.*

I'm not sure anything is more painful in life than the sting of rejection. You feel like such a fool. I think that most of us know what it is like to be rejected by someone else. Maybe it was that person that you asked out on a date and they made an excuse of why they couldn't go. Maybe it was that person that you yearned to ask you to the prom but they invited someone else.

Maybe it was the party that you heard about that you were not invited to. Maybe it was the parent that you have spent your life trying to impress but all you hear about is how successful your brother or sister is in that parent's eyes. Maybe it was the child you love who has rejected your love for them. Maybe it was the letter you opened up from another school informing you that you were not smart enough for them.

Maybe it was the office that you were called into where someone in power informed you that the company's plans no longer included you. Maybe it was the spouse who said that this marriage thing wasn't working out the way they wanted and they were going to be seeking a divorce.

Rejection is a hard thing to deal with. It is hard because we feel like it cuts to the core of who we are. If we are all honest with ourselves, we all know what it is like to sit in a quiet place and cry to yourself over the rejection which has come from another.

In our gospel story today, we see all of the elements which result in people being rejected. There is a large crowd and the resources are scant. There is but 5 loaves of bread and two fish. When ones sees scant resources, then rejection is usually the solution.

But the amazing thing about this story, which is the only miracle story in all of the 4 gospels so it must be really important, is that rejection doesn't occur here. Instead of rejection, Jesus makes more of the meager resources they have.

Jesus takes the meager portions and produces so much more that there is enough for all 5000 people with basketfuls of leftovers. In the presence of Jesus, there is no rejection but only acceptance. There is no rejection but an invitation to feast until all are fed.

You may have come into the worship service today feeling stung by some sort of rejection. Rejection from a person, a company, school, maybe your rejection comes from the society because there is something about you that scares others. But in this miracle story that we have read, there is no rejection from Jesus. There is only abundance.

I am personally thankful that the young woman who rejected me 25 years ago gave me a second chance.

You probably have noticed that there are fishes in your bulletin this morning. This morning I am going to invite you to write out on the fish during the prayers of the people a time when you felt rejection. On the other side of the fish you are invited to write the words, "Jesus welcomes me." During the final hymn, you will be invited to bring the fish up and put it into this net or you can take it with you. This net symbolizes the fish that was shared with so many.

Here in this sanctuary your rejection is turned into acceptance from the Christ.

We may have faced rejection in our life.

But in the presence of God in Jesus Christ, we are invited to experience God's abundance. Amen.

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-Paul Sherman story from "the Corner" blog found at <http://thecorner33.blogspot.com/2008/09/15-seconds-of-fame.html>

-Text: John 6: 1-14

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