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The Message: Overcoming Transplant Rejection: Live, Learn

As long as I can remember, I've volunteered as on call hospital chaplain, replacing social workers, discharge planners, unit coordinators and chaplains for a week at a time, from 4 pm - 8 am and the whole weekend. It never gets easy to walk into unknown critical situations with little preparation in the middle of the night. I'm in awe of those who do so regularly. There are shocking moments of ministry.

Jamie, a young man of 29, had a heart transplant at 19. He came into the ER with a lung infection

When the ER doctor discovered he had had a transplant, he asked if he was on anti rejection drugs. When Jamie said 'no,' the doctor responded, "well, you're going to die." And he did. Right then. Right there.

What the doctor didn't know was that he was on experimental treatments through University Hospital in London Ontario

In medicine, the immune reaction of a host organism to a foreign biological tissue is lessened when there is molecular similarity between the host and the transplanted tissue.

Instead of killing off all his antibodies so the heart would have a neutral environment, they were working on a new way of bringing the heart and the body into sync with each other.

His mother was convinced that this doctor frightened her son so badly that his body rejected his heart, that his fear caused rejection.

Fear so often does cause rejection.

Jesus returned home and stood in the synagogue, and announced his mission:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, ... to bring good news to the poor ... to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

The people of Nazareth had the best chance of accepting Jesus. He's preaching to a crowd of people who've known him since he was a tad; and they are pleased, and proud, and gracious.

By telling the audience in his home town that they are witnessing the inauguration of a new age of God's rule in all of life, Jesus challenged his hearers to believe in him.

He knew this was a challenge; even quoted the old proverb that a prophet had a hard time being accepted in his hometown.

But they knew him.

"Why, isn't that Joseph's boy?"

"Just a poor carpenter, he was, when he left us. And look at him now."

By all accounts it's a beautiful scene.

So what goes wrong?

How does this tender little homecoming suddenly turn so ugly?

I'm afraid it's Jesus' fault. Because right in the middle of all their pride and praise, he provokes the hometown crowd.

"No doubt you'll quote me the old proverb, 'Physician, heal yourself.'

And you'll probably want me to do here what you've heard I've been doing in Capernaum, that land so full of the Gentiles.

Well, guess what, no prophet is accepted in his hometown.

And when the prophets of old came to do miracles and wonders, more often than not it was for Israel's enemies. So it's not going to happen here."

Jesus tells them how provocative he's going to be.

This gospel is going to turn things upside down;

'God has done this before and it has made you angry', Jesus says. 'Now it is fulfilled in me.'

Jesus wasn't going to erase who they were to create an open slate that would accept him and his mission.

What does rejection mean? to throw back

In their rejection of Jesus, his people try to throw him off a cliff. They thought they knew him; but now he's foreign to them. He's scaring them.

In Luke's Gospel, the rejection will continue to happen for Jesus and will culminate in the women's testimony at the tomb, that Jesus has been raised. Even the disciples will react and suggest that what they say is a bunch of hooey.

Have you had the experience of rejecting something or someone because it or they seem so foreign, only to discover your mind changing? Often what I most reject can come to seem most precious. People who seemed so different ended up being dear friends.

In thinking about what God does in the face of rejection, I thought about how those doctors in London were seeking to overcome transplant rejection not by destruction, but by building up Jamie's body.

Just as rejection is lessened when there is molecular similarity, it's as if God adjusts our DNA to be receptive to Jesus and his Mission, even when it might not always look attractive initially.

God did this with Jeremiah, the prophet.

Jeremiah was called by God when he was young -- not prepared:

"Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy."

God not only called, but also gave Jeremiah what he needed by reassuring him and by "touching his mouth" to give him effective powers of speech. The prophet would need all of these gifts because his task was to pronounce God's judgment in a difficult religious and political situation in Israel.

As Jeremiah tells it, God says,

"Do not say, 'I am only a boy'; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you, Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you!"

Imagine, God is calling you, and even though you don't feel up for the job, God gives you what you need.

God makes our DNA so similar to Jesus that we can accept his message and live as he would.

Having been touched by the grace of God, having overcome our fear, our prejudice, our shame, we can respond to Jesus and reach out to touch others to speak and do God's work to all we meet: the living of Jesus' message in our proposed mission statement becomes possible!  
Our lives move into sync with Jesus' teaching and we avoid rejection.

As we here move from strangers, acquaintances to friends in Christ, as we are moving more into sync with one another, we are moving more into sync with Christ.

Because we have been baptized into Christ and have died with him, because Christ is raised from the dead so also we are now alive, raised to a life of grace and good works.

Jesus said, "This scripture is being fulfilled."

It is still being fulfilled in our hearing, even now, even here, even as we gather together here and as we are propelled out to lives of service, purpose, and meaning.