

Hebrews 13:11-16

When something is deliberately set apart from someone, it is commonly done for one of two reasons. Either that thing which is being set apart is respected and honored, or that thing which is being set apart is detestable. One man sets his car apart from the street because it is a classic roadster. He values it highly; so much so, that he keeps it under a tarp in his garage. Another man sets his car apart from the street and does not drive it because it's a piece of junk. It's worthless as a means of transportation.

We who are Christians properly set sex apart from us until marriage because we respect this gift of God and honor Him. On the other hand, we set garbage apart from us not because our trash is holy to us, but because it is detestable and we want to get rid of it. Trash day is a good day, isn't it? We can finally get rid of, for good, all those garbage bags which have been leaking and smelling for days.

Today's text in Hebrews 13 brings to mind the Jewish Day of Atonement. On this day the Jews would set apart an animal from their midst to be a sin offering. A goat, selected by the high priest, was sacrificed in the temple, its blood sprinkled within the holy place, but then the body...the carcass...was set apart from the people--it was taken outside the city gate and burned there. For the Jews this was their Trash Day. Not because that goat was a smelly, leaky old thing, but because it was a sin offering. As its body burned outside the city gate, it was telling the people that their sins had been taken away, removed, and burned for them. All the detestable things they had done in their life were gone for good.

Now the Jewish Day of Atonement did not stand by itself. As with everything in the Old Testament, it pointed to Jesus. "Jesus," our text says, "also was taken outside the city gate." This happened on Good Friday, our Day of Atonement. Jesus was set apart from the people. He became that goat. He was selected by the high priest, Caiaphas, as the One who should die. And so His blood was shed as the whips sank into His flesh. And then His body was taken outside the gate to be disposed of. There he was burned with the fires of hell upon the cross.

Now we know that when something is set apart, it's for one of two reasons. For which of those reasons was Jesus set apart? Because He was highly respected and honored by the people...or because they detested Him? How ironic is the answer that He who is holy, and honored by the angels, was set apart like garbage. They disposed of Jesus, throwing Him outside the gate of their city, because they detested Him as they would a leaky, smelly bag of trash.

Now at this point the author of our text gives us a rather intriguing invitation. "Let us," he says, "therefore go out to Him outside the camp and bear the reproach He endured." "Let's go live with the garbage bags," he is suggesting. "Let's not breathe in the good, clean air...let's sit with the refuse and live in the stench." But friends, all he's doing is calling us to follow Christ. If Jesus was seen as garbage by this world, then won't we also be seen as garbage by living as His disciples? Since our Lord was not highly honored and revered by the world, what makes us think that we will be? They set Him apart; they detested Him, and Jesus tells us, "They will also detest you for being My followers."

We can avoid this reproach, and many have, but at what cost? To live as if you do not belong to Jesus is to deny Him. To join in with the sinful world--with their contempt for the Commandments of God; with their detest for His House, His Word, His Sacraments--you will avoid the reproach of the unbelieving world, but those who deny Jesus now will be denied by Him on the Last Day.

Rather let us, as our text urges, go out to Jesus. Let us ever walk with Him, as we sing with our mouths. Let us put up with the ridicule, and the criticisms that come because we live out in public as Christian people. "He who confesses Me," says Jesus, "him will I confess before My Father in heaven."

It's not easy, though, is it? It's difficult to go out and live with the garbage, even though that garbage is Jesus and His church. The world has no use for us just as it had no use for Him. And it's tempting to live like our non-believing neighbors; it's tempting to hide our faith out in the world so that we avoid ridicule. It's tempting to live together before marriage, to join in with the conversation when our friends are cursing, to join in with the conversation when our friends are gossiping.

And we do give in, don't we, to temptation? Every day of our life we give in. There are days when our entire life is a stench, not to the world, but to our dear Father in heaven. There are days when we feel like trash because we have avoided Jesus, we have not gone out to Him. We have denied Him by how we have lived. And the sinful trash in our life can leak and stink worse than a bag of rotten eggs.

But friends, here is good news for you. Today is Trash Day. Oh, I know the trucks do not run on Sundays; but your Savior does. You've come here today with all the trash you've been collecting...your sins against God, your angry words against your spouse, your sexual sins, your secret sins, your sins of coveting, cursing, and the like. And it doesn't matter how smelly your trash is. It doesn't matter if the trash of your sins has been leaking out over your entire life and the lives of others. Today is Trash Day. Jesus is here for your trash...all of it. Even that trash which has been sitting in your conscience for years. Even that trash which you're not sure if you want to get rid of. He's here for it. Repent! He's here to forgive you.

The world does not think much of garbage men, but Jesus does not care. That's His whole mission in life - to remove the garbage in your life. To do this He was thrown out the gate of the city. He was thrown upon a cross where He died for you. And He's here now for your trash. "I forgive you," He says, "all of your sins." Come to My Supper...here is My body and blood for you, "for the remission of your sins."

When you leave here today, not one of you needs to leave with any garbage in your life. You leave with a clean heart. You leave in peace. You leave knowing that God forgives all the trash in your life. And as your trash builds up this week, you can rejoice knowing that next Sunday again is Trash Day. You Christians who are nothing but trash to the world, have something the world does not have. You have a place to come and dispose of your trash forever. You have the peace of believing in a Savior who became garbage for you so that now, in Him, all the sinful garbage in your life is completely forgiven. Amen.