

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
April 10, 2011**

Lenten Hymn Series

John 6:35,37-40

**“Just As I Am,
Without One Plea”**

Hymns: 104 – 738 – 396 – 387

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

John 6:35,37-40 – Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty... All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”

Have you ever been rejected? I’d guess the answer to that question for every one of us here is a resounding YES! Rejection might come in many different forms:

- A high school aged boy may get a note from his girlfriend that she wants to meet after lunch hour to talk. She tells him that he is such a nice guy, and has such a nice personality, but she’s just at a phase in her life where she’s confused and doesn’t know what

she wants. She wants to end their relationship. REJECTED!

- Another person walks into a store or a factory that’s hiring. They have a nice talk with the business manager and fill out an application for work. Perhaps the business manager is even hinting that the possibility of them being hired is very good! But when that person calls back in a week to see if they got the job, it’s been given to someone else. REJECTED!
- A young couple may walk into a bank because they need a loan to buy a house. They talk with very nice people who want to help them out and they fill out a mountain of paperwork. A few days later the call comes. They are turned down for their loan because they don’t have enough collateral. REJECTED!

Rejection comes in many forms. That’s why the message that we will hear today will make us so joyful. We are continuing a sermon series during our Sunday services this Lent on well-known hymns. Today we examine the Scripture text and hymn verses of “**Just As I Am, Without One Plea,**” penned by Charlotte Elliot. This hymn will talk about rejection and acceptance. Let’s first examine the Scripture verses from John 6, which this hymn is based on. Then we’ll learn something about the life of the poet. And finally we’ll look at how the hymn verses convey these Biblical truths to us.

1 – We read from John 6: “*Jesus declared, ‘I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who*

believes in me will never be thirsty... All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.'

It would be good to know the context in which Jesus said those words. Just before this account, Jesus had fed the 5000. Then, after he sent his disciples across the Sea of Galilee, he appeared to them during the storm in the night, walking on the water. In the morning, the people were looking for him. They came around the lake and found him and the twelve disciples. They proceed to have an exchange that follows like this:

- Jesus tells them he knows why they have come. They want more food! He tells them this is not a noble reason to find him.
- The people then ask him what they're supposed to be doing to please God.
- Jesus tells them that the most pleasing thing is to believe in the One God has sent.
- Then the people ask him for a sign. What will he do to convince them he is the One God has sent? They bring up the fact that they knew Moses was from God because he gave them bread (manna) in the wilderness.

Jesus picks up on their picture and tells them the words of our text. He is Bread from heaven, and he gives life to the world. He has living water from heaven. Those who

come to him will never spiritually go hungry or be thirsty, for he will not cast them away but will nourish their faith.

Let's look at these words more closely. It's evident from Jesus' words that people naturally have a "hunger" and a "thirst" inside of them. What does this mean? God has put inside every person the knowledge that there is more to our existence than this life and the things we can see around us. The book of Ecclesiastes states the same thing when it says that God "*has set eternity in the hearts of men.*" People naturally know that there must be something bigger to life than just eating and drinking, working and resting. There must be a bigger God out there that they will have to answer to. People sense that there must be something after this life and beyond our mortal bodies.

So how do you fill this "hunger?" Unfortunately, people look to many misguiding and false sources in their quest:

- The Prodigal Son filled his life with the pursuit of party and pleasure. He squandered his inheritance with prostitutes.
- The rich fool wanted to find his ultimate joy in acquiring and storing his wealth. He felt the need to build bigger barns after his bumper crop because he "had it made" and could "eat, drink, and be merry."

Today, some sources that people look to for their ultimate satisfaction aren't wrong in and of themselves, but won't give them the lasting satisfaction in the meaning of life:

- Some today pursue education as the complete meaning of their spiritual existence

- To others, travel and activities are what they pursue
- As noble and God-pleasing as charity work is, some look to this as the only way to find fulfillment and satisfaction for their soul without knowing the Christian motivation of why we serve our fellow man.

What does Jesus say to the one who hungers and thirsts for meaning in this life and the next? He has the answer! The answer is himself. He is the Bread that has come down from heaven. He is the Water of life. He has come as the Messiah from the Father himself who will win the salvation of the world. It will not come in pursuing the carnal pleasures of this life or even in simple service to our fellow man. It comes through the life and death of Jesus Christ, which paid the price of mankind's sin and assures sinful mortals that they have a place in heaven. We see this so clearly during Lent. **He fills the void of "eternity in the hearts of men" because Jesus reveals who his Father is and how we can stand righteous before him after our earthly life!**

Jesus gives the people of his day an invitation to believe that he has come from his Father as the promised Messiah. This is reminiscent of other places in Scripture that issue such an invitation:

- *"Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon."* (Isaiah 55:7)
- *"A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out."* (Isaiah 42:3)

- *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."* (Matthew 11:28-30)

This is no promotion of Decision Theology. It is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that we could ever be converted and believe in the Bread of life who has come down from heaven. Yet God packages his blessings in an invitation to mankind that the Holy Spirit causes believers to accept (1 Thessalonians 2:13). He lays the invitation out to the spiritually sick and hungry, to those who fully realize their sin and mortality and grieve over their lost condition.

The worthy recipient is pictured by Christ in the Parable of the Pharisee and Tax Collector in the temple. The one who trumpets his own life and works and comes on his own merits will be rejected. But the one who comes on his knees, realizing his guilt and looking to his Savior in faith, will be accepted on the merits of Christ. The same is true in receiving communion. Many people ask pastors if they should stay away from the communion table if they're feeling "far from God" and have "sinned badly." The truth is that when we feel high and mighty, we are not properly prepared to receive communion. When we feel broken up over our sin, we are worthy.

To such a person who comes, Jesus lists comforting promises here in John 6:

- He will not cast them out
- He will never "lose" them. They will not perish due to neglect or distraction by the Good Shepherd

- Jesus will raise them from the dead on the Last Day and he will give them eternal life

What wonderful promises Jesus has for those who “come as they are!” Yet do you know the result of his conversation with the people that day? They grumbled about what he said and many of them left and did not follow him anymore. Why? They wanted the “other bread!”

2 – Let’s take a look at this concept now as Charlotte Elliot lived her life. Charlotte was born in England on March 18, 1789. She was born into a religious family. Her grandfather was a minister. Her brother became a pastor. Charlotte was very well educated, which was not common in her day. She loved music and the arts. Tragedy struck her, however, when she was 32 years old. A serious ailment left her an invalid the rest of her life. She was bed-ridden much of the time and in much pain. She also seems to have suffered from what today we would call “chronic fatigue syndrome,” which really wipes out a person’s energy.

Soon after her debilitating sickness, a family friend who was a pastor visited the family named Caesar Malan. Charlotte was doubting her faith at the time. He asked her about her faith in Christ and she gave him a rather rude answer. For a few weeks her behavior toward the pastor bothered her, and when she saw him again she apologized and mentioned that she was struggling with how to find her Savior and feel comfort. He told her that she needed to bring nothing, but to come just as she was, a phrase that seems to have stuck in her mind.

Twelve years later she wrote the hymn “Just As I Am” on a day when she was feeling down. Her brother, who was a minister, was having a fundraiser in 1836 to

raise money to build a school for daughters of pastors. Charlotte was unable to go to the fundraiser that day, so she stayed home alone, dismayed that she was of no use to family in their efforts. She took pen in hand and proceeded to write this hymn. She shared it with her sister-in-law that day, who shared it with others, unknown to Charlotte. It made its way into a hymnal called the “Invalid’s Hymn Book,” which was published in 1836. It included John 6:37 as a heading: “*All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.*” Charlotte had a total of 115 hymns in the book. Altogether she wrote about 150 hymns during her lifetime.

Of all her hymns, “Just As I Am Without One Plea” has made the biggest impact on Christians down through the years. After her death in 1871, over 1000 letters were found in her personal belongings from people expressing their thanks for her writing this hymn. In fact, her brother later said, “**In the course of a long ministry I hope I have been permitted to see some fruit of my labor, but I feel that far more has been done by a single hymn of my sister’s.**”

3 – Let’s turn now to the hymn that Charlotte Elliott wrote on that day long ago, and see how she captured these thoughts.

Verse 1 begins:

**Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidd’st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come.**

Please note the basis on which we come to God and are accepted by him. Most people want to be accepted on the basis of what they have done or what their natural behavior is. Charlotte Elliott, however,

realized that before God we have “no plea,” no natural reason to be accepted.

So if you’re here today trying to justify yourself or make excuses for your sins, give it up. If you’re coming with the plea, “Well, everyone’s a sinner,” and downplaying your guilt, give it up. If you want to blame others for your sins and call them a result of your bad upbringing or being a victim of circumstances, give it up. As Charlotte Elliott says, we come only on the merits of Christ’s shed blood and only because he has invited us.

Verse 2 continues:

**Just as I am, and waiting not
To rid my soul of one dark blot,
To Thee whose blood can cleanse each spot,
O Lamb of God, I come.**

The noteworthy thought in this verse is the fact that no waiting is necessary for the sinner. Have you spent time in a waiting room? Have you waited in line at the post office or the bank? Has your checkout line at the grocery store been ridiculous? Have you been at the doctor’s office or dentist’s office waiting for what seems to be forever? Charlotte Elliott correctly states that for the repentant sinner, no waiting is necessary! Christ’s forgiveness is immediate and complete.

Verse 3 says:

**Just as I am, though tossed about
With many a conflict, many a doubt,
Fightings and fears within, without,
O Lamb of God, I come.**

Charlotte Elliott knew from experience that sufferings and afflictions continue in the life of a Christian, and that fears and doubts may continue as well. In the Old Testament, Job was advised to “*curse God and die*” by his wife. Might

some of you be tempted in the midst of pain, trials, and suffering to do just that? Rather, as Charlotte Elliott encourages, let us bring these to Jesus, who promises the strength to get through our fears and doubts.

Verse 4 continues:

**Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind;
Sight, riches, healing of the mind,
Yea, all I need in Thee to find,
O Lamb of God, I come.**

The Bible has many pictures for coming to faith and experiences the blessings of a Christian life:

- The blind receiving sight
- The sick being healed
- The destitute becoming rich

Charlotte Elliott reminds us of all these pictures, and also stresses that we need a “healing of the mind” as believers. By nature we have a mixed up way of looking at life. Our natural mind is selfish; it has mixed up values, and even thinks evil is good at times. Romans 12 tells us, “*Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*” May our minds experience this “healing” that we need!

Verse 5 says:

**Just as I am, Thou wilt receive,
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
Because Thy promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come.**

Charlotte Elliott believed Christ’s promises, and so can you. Think back on all the remarkable promises God kept in Scripture:

- Abraham had a son in his old age
- The nation of Israel was delivered from slavery in Egypt

- and was brought safely to the
Promised Land
- A virgin bore a child

God's promise of salvation will surely be kept as well!

And finally, verse 6 tells us:

**Just as I am, Thy love unknown
Hath broken every barrier down;
Now, to be Thine, yea, Thine alone,
O Lamb of God, I come.**

Verse 6 brings a change of thought. The first five verses speak of the blessings that Christ gives to all who come to him. Here in the last verse, Charlotte Elliott speaks of what she will give to Christ, namely herself. This order represents good theology. Only after we have a new self inside us that God has put there and believes in his gift of forgiveness can we dedicate our lives to him. Forgiven and blessed in Christ, may we join her in her prayer of dedication.

So finally, in this hymn we see great comfort as people who have been rejected in various ways in this life. Have you been rejected? Denied? Spurned? If so, take heart! Along with Charlotte Elliot, we can rejoice that as spiritual invalids we are invited by our Savior to come to him. May the forgiveness and eternal life that he promises us be our comfort in life, in our earthly struggles, and in death. Amen.

Based on a series first done by Pastor Arthur Graf in
"Joybells of Life."