

Rejection and Welcome.

Main passage - Mark 6: 1-13; also 2 Samuel 5:1-10.

What was a moment of rejection for you? A job interview you were sure you should get and unfortunately you didn't. Was it a boy or a girl whom you really liked and unfortunately they did not like you in the same way... How did you feel towards that person or company later. Did it take time to let it go, or next morning you got up, new start ...

What about a memorable time of welcome? Maybe a time you remember coming home from having been away for a time? It warms my heart when I have come through Schiphol and you come out of Departures and you see all these people waiting - some with signs, others just waiting and then you see the shouts the hugs and the welcome.

Then to think, when you remember a time when you were rejected because you were a Christian - maybe it was simply because you were a Christian, or a Christian opinion you shared or perhaps wanted to talk about how important your faith has become to you...

To think when you were welcomed because of your faith - because of being a Christian...

Not hard to see where we all prefer to be. But our gospel says we will experience both in our Christian life - rejection and welcome - because of our Christian faith, because our Lord and Saviour experienced both. We read about Jesus rejection and the immediately we read of him sending out the 12 apostles - telling them in some places they will be welcomed, in others not. As he has been treated, so can his followers.

Our readings show already a great contrast. There has been years of civil war in Israel, Saul's son is murdered. David is approached. He is asked to be the one who will shepherd Israel. They acknowledge that though Saul was King, it was God at work through David. Welcomed to lead them to be in charge.

Jesus. He moves on from the town where we have seen the lady with long term internal bleeding healed and the 12 year old girl raised from the dead. Jesus knows his mission is to have the good news of the kingdom preached through all Galilee. And now to his home town. He goes into the synagogue and teaches and we hear the same things being said at that start of his ministry - people are amazed at his teaching and wonder where he gets this teaching from. But he is not welcomed, like his ancestor David. They can see he has wisdom, he has authority to teach, he has done miracles. But they reject him... It says - "they took offence at him."

They are focused upon *where* does he get the wisdom and power to do these things. Instead of asking what does it all mean for their faith, their relationship with God and what he wants to do in their lives. Jesus who has power and authority to teach, to heal sickness, over death, over nature and power and authority to forgive sins. Despite all he has done and taught and what people know and have heard - they reject him.

The issue. They think they know him. They know his family - his brothers and sisters. They know his job among them - a carpenter, suggesting Jesus was technically skilled and physically strong. They know him and they know his parents. He is Mary's Boy. There are Jewish writings in the Apocrypha that there was a belief that scribes had time to learn wisdom, those who worked with their hands, did not. Too busy with life and work to learn wisdom. The Greeks and Romans had disdain for working class,

anyone working with their hands. A famous orator Secundus from Athens was mocked because he was the son of a carpenter. For them a carpenter was seen as uneducated, someone with nothing to share. Now as Mark writes his gospel primarily to Christians in Roman Greek world, they are challenged.

Jesus comes from a humble town - not a famous one - he comes from a humble family (not one eg from the priests or whose parents had done mighty things), a humble trade. The people of Nazareth wanted a Jesus they could see his great credentials - but they couldn't get beyond what they thought they know. You know of all the towns, you would have thought Nazareth would have been the one. They grew up with him. They would have seen his kindness, his love, his devotion. For people we know - or have known - what does it take for people to recognise who Jesus truly is?

The experience in Nazareth reminds us that rejection can come where it is least expected, rejection can come when it is least expected.

I remember after I had become a Christian, there was a friend of mine Joanne, studied law in different universities. Also from N. Ireland living in neighbouring towns. Christmas 1993. Rang her up to catch up, as we chatted, I mentioned that I had become a Christian, just that. But she immediately said she had no time for religion or Christianity because of the country we lived in - her father had served in the army and had been killed in our times of terrorism. Deep pain. For Joanne. The mere idea of Christianity was hard for her. I did not expect that and it was painful as it came right into our friendship.

Maybe you have had similar experiences. A theologian writing on this passage shared the pain that can come into families. The

children etc or our brothers or sisters are brought up in the faith and yet somehow, they do not see the person of Jesus and feel in fact they know all there is to know and turn to other religions, spiritualities or no faith at all. They reject something very precious to us and it is painful.

This theme of rejection is further emphasised. As we said, the twelve are sent out, they go in his name, they are to preach what he taught, they are to work by his power. Then we jump to v30-32 of the disciples returning, they told Jesus all they had done and taught. Then the crowds gather again wanting to hear Jesus teaching, wanting his healing touched - welcoming him among them.

But inbetween the disciples going (v13) and coming back (v30) is the story of John the Baptist - we heard about his birth a few weeks back - now we hear of his death. The King - Herod - who would hear the message yet do not thing about it. The Queen - Herodias - who was threatened by the talk of a King and repentance. It suggests that in this mission and ministry of going, there can be those who are against Christians, that those Christians who go, may face threats, danger, prison, threat to life. To go in the name of Christ to speak his words and do his works, may not be popular...

As a Church we recognise that parts of our worldwide Christian family are persecuted because they believe in Jesus or seek to live a faithful life in following and serving him. In our Albania link, Edi in April shared prayer points about some of their members whom Andrew and Peter know.

Franko - passionate to follow Jesus - but from Muslim parents. He emigrated to the USA and they were banning him from going to church. Edi was threatened over the phone not to try contacting

Franko in the USA. Edi shared, in the past month, things have become easier for Franko.

Sarah and Stella who have led worship - two sisters 20 and 17 - the parents again have been very angry at Edi and his wife Bona for trying to disciple the girls, and when the girls said they would move out to a small flat rented by the church, their father became even more angry and once bit them. Again things have become a little easier in recent weeks, Edi shared in his latest prayer email. The simple fact of being Christians.

In the Middle East, there are stories of where people become Christians, there parents have held funerals for them saying their children are now dead. In China, millions are denied education because they are Christian, or prevented from progressing in their careers.

It is one reason we continue to pray for Albania - to be a support as it becomes harder being a Christian there - one reason we pray for persecuted believers across our world for we believe our God answers prayer and we need to continue hence we pray for believers in different parts of the world each week as we stand alongside those who face rejection.

Paul writes to a young church plant who are suffering for being Christian.

"You became imitators of us and of the Lord. For you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit." (1 Thessalonians 1:6).

They were rejected. They were even persecuted. Yet they were filled with joy. Suffering mixed with joy in faith. You would expect as they are rejected, they would be in misery - we want to

be welcomed as we began with. But when the good news was preached, suffering came, but the Holy Spirit also imparted joy to those who believed even though they were not welcomed. The Spirit who grows that fruit within us - not just love, but joy. At the end of that letter, Paul says to them:

"Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

His letters in general come to young churches who face rejection as well as welcome from their relatives, communities. Yet Paul is assured of the good news of Jesus. He is assured that like their Lord, they face rejection for being faithful. But also they know that through that ultimate rejection on a Friday morning before a Roman governor, salvation has come, forgiveness, hope, healing. He is assured that as we take bread and wine, we remember and rejoice in our salvation and forgiveness, but also remember that our Lord was "despised and rejected." (Isaiah 53:3).

Rejection, welcome. Jesus was welcomed in so many ways by so many people. Yet his own town rejected him. As we end each service - 'go in peace to love and serve the Lord. In the name of Christ' - as we go, we pray for those who do face rejection for their faith, we ask God to strengthen us for the times we will face it maybe because of what we say or do or simply we follow in the footsteps of the Lord and call him Lord. We pray that we and others find joy through the Spirit in such times.

Amen.