

12 Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C February 3, 2019
Jeremiah 1:4-5,17-19 Psalm 71 1Corinthians 12:31-3:13 Luke 4:21-30

One of the greatest pains we can feel today is the pain of rejection, the feeling of not being loved, the feeling of not being wanted. Have you ever been rejected? Do you remember how you felt? Let's turn the situation around. Have *you* rejected someone? Do you remember how you felt when you were rejecting the person? Today's Gospel touches our hearts with its story of Jesus being rejected by His own people in Nazareth.

Today's Gospel Reading continues from last week when Jesus goes back to His hometown of Nazareth. It is the Sabbath and the men have invited Jesus to teach in the synagogue. Jesus presents a scroll and reads from the prophet Isaiah. After reading the Scroll, Jesus says, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Their first reaction to Jesus is extremely favourable. However, their admiration soon turns into doubt, and then into hostility. What has gone wrong? The men still see Jesus as just the son of Joseph, the carpenter. The people are outraged and their hearts are darkened with anger because they cannot accept that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah. Jesus tells the Jewish people that the Gentiles are more open to God than *they* are. Jesus says, "no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown."

Then Jesus tells the people two stories from the Old Testament of what happened to the prophets. In the first story, Jesus points out that it was only Elijah who could miraculously produce food for a Gentile woman when there was a great drought in the land of Sidon. And in the second story, it was only Elisha who could perform healing powers on a Syrian, a Gentile named Naaman. In these stories, it is the Gentiles, not the Jewish people, the chosen ones of God, who accept the prophets.

Jesus tells the people that it will be the Gentiles who will accept His message. The angry crowd drives Jesus out of town and they try to hurl Him off a cliff. Scripture says "But Jesus passed through the midst of them and went on His way." Jesus suffers the fate of all prophets, that is, rejection by His own people. Jesus never returns again to his hometown of Nazareth.

The reaction of the Nazareth townspeople to Jesus foreshadows Israel's rejection of the prophets. As in the Old Testament, they tried to kill the prophets and their messages, and now the people try to kill Jesus and His message of salvation.

Although today's Gospel is about the rejection of Jesus, the greatest prophet of all, the work of prophecy continues in every generation as people are invited to witness to Christ, not simply with words, but with their lives. The mission of Christ points to our mission which we received at our Baptism.

God has called us to a particular mission but He has not promised easy success or popularity. There will be moments when we will have to make a decision to stand up for Christ to fulfill our mission to bring the Good News of Christ to all people.

How sad it is that the majority of the people who are gathered there that day are unable to see that Jesus truly is the long-awaited Messiah. It seems they are blinded by their experience of Jesus growing up humbly among them as the son of a carpenter. The Messiah is supposed to be someone like the great King David, who threw off the oppressors and restored the nations of Israel. Jesus certainly didn't fit the bill. And so they reject Jesus and His message of salvation.

This same story of Jesus' rejection has played itself out for the past two thousand years. What can we do when we ourselves feel the terrible pain of rejection? The answer is found in the last passage of today's Gospel, "But passing through the midst of them He went away." Jesus did not let rejection from those in His hometown stop Him from continuing His mission of God's love and salvation to all people.

Jesus continued to speak the truth that no one wanted to hear. Jesus does not let such hostility deter Him from accomplishing His mission. This is only the beginning of the opposition He will face as He makes His way toward His destiny in Jerusalem. Jesus has come to preach the Good News, regardless of how well it will be received. What happened that day in Nazareth was to be repeated over and over again during His ministry, with crucifixion as the final outcome.

St. Luke's community in our Gospel reading does not let rejection stop them from speaking the truth of Jesus Christ and His mission, or from loving those who have persecuted them. The community continues the ministry and mission of Jesus in spite of the threat of death.

The message from today's Gospel is that we can imitate Jesus and we can imitate the community of St. Luke. We are called to preach the Good News, regardless of how well it will be received among our brothers and sisters, even if it means rejection.

When Jesus was rejected and nailed to the cross and died, He rose from the dead and He kept on loving people. Often through misunderstanding from our family, friends and many parts of the world because of our faith in Jesus, we can expect rejection and we may feel like we too are being nailed to the cross.

When we sometimes feel rejected for speaking the truth about Jesus' message, we can always turn to Jesus who has His arms open and waiting to help us. Jesus' experience of rejection means that He understands what we are going through. He is not asking us to endure anything that He has not endured Himself. If we bear these things in mind, it will help us to keep our eyes firmly fixed upon Jesus, and make slow and steady progress in growing in faith and holiness in our daily lives as we witness to the values and teachings of Jesus. Always stand up for what you believe in, even if it means standing alone with Jesus.