

## **"Facing Rejection" – Mark 6:1-13 – July 8, 2018**

**Rev. Rachel A. Wann**

No one likes to feel rejection. If you're like me, you probably cringe in the face of rejection. I still have nightmares about junior high school. You know what I'm talking about. Most of us learned at an early age, rejection hurts. And we also learned how to create defense mechanisms to try to lessen the pain. We put up walls and tried to ignore it. Or we avoided any situations that left us feeling vulnerable.

I thought things would get better the older I got. That maybe people would grow up and mature and learn to not be so cruel. But that was before the Internet. It seems we can never escape rejection.

Some rejection hurts worse than others. Getting glared at by an irate driver on the highway isn't nearly as devastating as betrayal by a friend. Harassment from a neighbor isn't quite as painful as abuse by a family member. Being the object of gossip at work isn't quite the same as being the object of gossip at church.

What's the difference? The level of intimacy. Rejection from strangers certainly does hurt. But what hurts worse, is facing rejection from those we love and trust. Around strangers or acquaintances, we don't feel so vulnerable. We haven't invested ourselves in them or in their lives, so it's easier to walk away when we get hurt. But to those who are close to us, to those whom we love, we have dropped our defenses. We have allowed ourselves to be vulnerable in their presence. And when they reject us by their words or by their actions, we may feel pain, betrayal, or sorrow. We wonder, how could this person I know and love and trust do this to me?

Jesus experienced this. Right in his hometown. He'd been teaching, preaching, healing, calming storms, casting out demons, even raising a little girl from death. He'd been throughout his homeland and traveled across the Sea of Galilee to the Gentiles. He had had his fair share of rejections. Not everybody listened to the message of repentance that he brought with him. He had faced skeptics from all sides. Many of the religious authorities were so disgusted with him, they were already plotting how to do him in.

But back in his hometown, when Jesus went over to the synagogue and began to teach, the people didn't accept his religious authority. Perhaps there is truth to the old saying goes, "familiarity breeds contempt." The local people saw him only as a carpenter, the son of Mary, with brothers and sisters they all knew. They were scandalized by his teachings in the synagogue and refused to hear his message or believe the stories told about him. They were unwilling to hear him, because they couldn't believe he could be anything more than what they pictured in their own minds, based on their memories of him.

There are many additional reasons people might reject us. Some will do it out of their own insecurities. People feel a sense of power through rejecting others. These are the bullies, the malicious gossips, those who must be in the in-crowd and their sense of self-worth is heightened by demeaning other people. This is devastating when it occurs within the family context, especially in abusive relationships, where there seems to be no way out. Other people will reject us because they

simply don't like or believe or agree with what we have to say or what we stand for. This type of rejection has permeated our society, causing the polarization we see online and, in the media, and to the very seat of our national and state governments.

Other times we're rejected because the other person has grown away from us. People change and grow at different rates and in different directions. If people grow too far apart from one another, invariably one will reject the other in an effort to move on. This can be exceedingly painful in our interpersonal relationships.

Other rejections occur because of simple personality conflicts, one person just can't seem to get along with another person. Or rejection occurs due to misinformation or misunderstanding and an unwillingness to discover the truth. Rather than face some type of conflict with another person, it is much easier to reject the person and avoid any confrontation. And this is where our defense mechanisms backfire. Over the course of our lives we learned to put up walls or to run the other way in order to avoid rejection. But then at some point those walls or the avoidance of conflict cause us to reject someone else. The very rejection we loathe to experience, we dish out to other people.

Jesus understood rejection firsthand but was not daunted by it. After he left his hometown, his next action was to send out his twelve disciples. He knew they would not always be welcomed with open arms. He knew that they too would have the door slammed in their faces. So before they left, he instructed them on how to deal with rejection. They would be bringing a message that not everyone would be willing or open to hear, and so Jesus prepared them.

First he instructed them to be vulnerable. They were not to go out fully laden with supplies. They could take only those clothes on their backs and a staff. No extra clothes, no food, no money. Possessions implied reliance on self. Instead, they had to rely on the hospitality of others. Being vulnerable when dealing with others isn't easy. The fear of rejection is always there lurking just beneath the surface. Did you ever notice what we do when we meet new people? Questions seem to always be about our status – who is our family? What is our job? Where do we live? Where did we come from? What groups are we involved with? Of course, this is a way we get to know about someone. We have to ask questions like this. But when we hear the answers, we begin to make judgments, and if that person appears to be a threat in some way, we begin to raise our defenses. It's human nature to determine who has the upper hand in a relationship.

Jesus teaches a different way – the way of vulnerability. Others will be more open to the message of the gospel if they're not having to worry about putting up their own defenses around us.

Next Jesus instructs his disciples to be gracious. When they come to a village and someone invites them to their home, they are to stay there. They are not supposed to look around for better accommodations. They are to be courteous guests, honoring their hosts, no matter how humble the setting. This is a warning to not judge people by possessions, wealth or status. Appearances aren't supposed to matter. We are to be gracious to everyone, or else we run the risk of rejecting someone for want of what we think is something better.

And finally Jesus tells his disciples what to do if they are rejected. If that occurs, they are to shake the dust from their sandals and move on. In this context the disciples are not responsible for someone else's decision concerning the gospel. We cannot force others to believe that Jesus is the Christ, we must move on to tell others.

Any time we're rejected we have to deal with the negative emotions that surface within us. Sometimes we dwell on them, agonizing over why it happened. Wondering how the other person could be so cruel or insensitive or hardheaded to the message we have to share. As we all know, focusing our energy on negative things is not healthy for us. Jesus tells us to move on. Sure, it takes time to heal, but remaining too long in self-pity can be just as destructive as the initial hurt. We've got to learn to let it go. And sometimes that will require seeking professional assistance from others to help along the journey toward healing.

Each of us who claims to be a follower of Jesus Christ has accepted the responsibility of discipleship. We are each called to minister to others in the name of Christ and share his gospel. Each one of us has also experienced rejection in some form or fashion. Some have experienced much more than others. Jesus was no stranger to rejection. As his disciples, we have been sent out into the world in such a way that invites rejection. Our lives are to mirror the gospel. What we say and what we do are reflections of our life in Christ. Being vulnerable and gracious to others helps us to forge relationships, but when rejection occurs, Christ compels us to move on.