

Each one of us has a calling from God to share our stories of faith with those around us. Does that sound a little scary, talking to someone about Jesus? Or telling someone about how God answered a prayer or maybe about an event at church that you really loved?

When we share something personal with other people, like how Jesus is working in our lives, we are taking a risk because the other person could always reject us. And if we're sharing about God on social media, well a whole bunch of people at once could reject us! With just the click of a button.

Rejection is fact of life that Jesus was actually well-acquainted with. We see an instance of this in today's Gospel reading. Jesus and his disciples have just come from several intense encounters in which Jesus freed a demon possessed man, healed a woman who was ill for twelve years, and raised a little girl from the dead. They've been surrounded by crowds with many demands and comments.

But now, Jesus leaves all of that and returns to his hometown, back to Nazareth. I wonder if the disciples were excited after hearing stories about Jesus growing up and maybe hearing some stories about Jesus's time as a carpenter in his little village...

To the disciples, it probably seems like they are about to get some breathing room after all that non-stop travel and being pushed around by massive crowds who want to see what Jesus is up to. Yes, Nazareth probably seems like it's about to be a safe, quiet respite, where they can enjoy Jesus really getting his message across and really soak in his teachings.

So, they arrive in Nazareth. Mark doesn't tell us how long they are there, but he does say that the next Sabbath Jesus goes to the local synagogue to teach. So, I'd like to imagine Jesus and the disciples had a few days to rest there, enjoying all the local dishes that Jesus loved growing up, and maybe even getting to see some of the houses that Jesus helped to build in his work as a carpenter.

Whatever the case, that sense of comfort, ease, and acceptance is shattered that Sabbath, a day that should be all about resting in God and enjoying community. Instead, as Jesus gets up to teach, the people in the synagogue are shocked at what the former local carpenter has to say.

There they all are inside the cool of the stone building with the flickering oil lamps and shafts of sunlight coming in through narrow openings along the wall. Jesus is standing up at the center teaching from a Torah scroll and what's coming out of his mouth is just incredible. The people can't believe it. What's more, the Torah scroll he is teaching from is resting on a little, plain, but sturdy wooden table that some of the people there remember Jesus built years ago. What presumption! A carpenter like him trying to teach them!

As Jesus is teaching, some of the bolder men start saying out loud, "He's just a carpenter." They gesture at the table he built.

"He's the son of Mary. You all know her! And you know his brothers James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon."

Someone else scoffs, "Yes. His sisters live right here in Nazareth!"

The people in the synagogue are so offended that as a whole they reject Jesus and refuse to believe what he's telling them. Jesus is rejected **DESPITE** the wisdom he shows. Jesus is rejected **DESPITE** the power of his miracles. And the text tells us that Jesus was amazed at their unbelief. Amazed.

Jesus is rejected here, but this won't be the last time, and it isn't the first. Being dismissed by the very people he came to teach and heal is a risk that Jesus takes over and over again even unto death on the cross, dying for our sins, and forgiving us.

A few chapters past this account, a little later in Mark, Jesus says that eventually he will “suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.”

And this is just what happens. What’s more Jesus promises us that we will face rejection because of our connection to him, our faith, our belief in salvation through Christ. This probably doesn’t sound like good news to you. With all of this rejection of Jesus, we might think what hope is there for us.

And I am sure that just as Jesus was refused by the people he knew, that we have also each suffered some form of rejection like this from the people we may least expect it from. We live in a world in which people make choices or even just react out of sin and end up hurting others. Rejection is one part of the reality of living in a world with sin.

I have a story about this. Well, two stories actually. Today is my first Sunday preaching as your vicar. I’ve recently started my one year pastoral internship here at Advent, and this is a really happy and exciting time for me. But this journey toward becoming a pastor has not been one full of just excitement; there’s been plenty of heartache too.

A little over three years ago I started the call process, the process toward ordination to become a pastor in the Lutheran church. Before this, my friends and family knew that I was a Christian, and I did experience some rejection along the way, but publicly saying,

“Hey. God has called me into ministry, and I’m going to follow Jesus where he leads” makes the conversation fresh for people, or maybe even more real. Taking a public stand for Jesus can cause the people around you to reevaluate things.

A few weeks before I went before the candidacy committee to see if I could start the process to become a pastor and attend seminary, a longtime friend ended our friendship. She just couldn’t see staying friends with me. I still had good friends left, but the timing and circumstances really hurt. Since then, I’ve seen other people pull away from me or worry about what they say in front of me.

These smaller rejections are just something that I have learned we can come to expect when we are open about our love for Jesus and our desire to follow Him, whether we have a call into ministry or not. Maybe you have experienced something similar. A friend’s snide remark about Christians? A family member insisting they don’t need to go to church and questioning why you go beyond Christmas and Easter? And even as I say all of this, I have to admit that I am not innocent of rejecting others, either.

Back in high school, I was caught up in trying to intellectually disprove Christianity. I couldn’t believe in Jesus, and I wasn’t shy about arguing with Christians who went to my school. Sadly, I started to be really hard on a close friend of mine. She and I were in the science club together and spent a lot of weekends hanging out. When she felt Jesus calling her to follow him more closely, I was furious. She started to not just go to church occasionally with her family but to go every weekend and even started attending a Christian club at the high school. She invited me, and I went once, but I resented her for it. The kids at the club wanted me to believe in Jesus and shared their faith with me. I was insulted!

Despite how I rejected my friend, we somehow stayed close. I even went to visit her in college. About six months after that visit after a lot of soul-searching and reading, I realized I believed in Jesus and became a Christian. Then, I found out my friend, the one I had rejected so many times, had been praying for me the whole time.

Wow. That was humbling. All that time I was dismissing her in small and big ways, but she never gave up on me. Despite rejection, God had sent her out to share her faith.

And now, here I am with a complicated past of rejection on the path to becoming a pastor, being sent out by God. Interestingly, rejection and sending out have a relationship with one another, and we see this in today's reading from Mark as well. To explore this, let's look at what happens after the very public and seeming unanimous rejection that Jesus experiences in Nazareth.

After a big loss like the one Jesus goes through, we might imagine it would be a good time for Jesus to take one of his solo nights of prayer up in the mountains, rest, reflect, and regroup.... but this is not what he does.

Mark says that after being rejected and amazed at the unbelief he faced, Jesus THEN "went from village to village, teaching the people". That big public embarrassment in Nazareth doesn't stop Jesus. He just keeps traveling with his message and miraculous healings. What's more, Jesus calls together his twelve disciples and starts sending THEM out two by two.

Jesus, God in human form, empowers his followers to go out with his message and ministry. And, as part of his instructions for this early mission, he advises them on what to do when faced with rejection. "If any place refuses to welcome you or listen to you shake its dust from your feet as you leave."

Jesus prepares his followers to face rejection, even as he sends them out. Now, I am NOT suggesting that the next time someone rejects you that you go out to their welcome mat and dramatically wipe your feet before slamming the door on the way out. The instructions Jesus gives here are for an early part of his ministry and so they had their time and place.

But what I am telling you, is that just as Jesus sent his disciples, he is sending you to risk rejection and to bear witness to who He is, the savior of the world who died and rose again, and to bear witness to what He offers, salvation by faith through grace for all who believe.

Despite rejection you have been through or the potential rejection you fear, Jesus is sending you out to witness to His power in your life to tell others about God's grace, love, mercy and to tell others about who Jesus is and how He is at work in your life.

God is not sending you out alone. You have the power of God behind you. The Holy Spirit who lives in you and empowers you is your guide. You have your community of faith here at Advent, the Lord's supper to sustain you. You have the word of God.

So, despite any type of rejection, Jesus is sending you out as his witness today and every day. Amen.

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