

Jesus rejected in Nazareth

This dramatic incident with Jesus being run out of his home town is recorded by 3 of the Gospel writers - Matthew, Mark and Luke.

Jesus returned to his home town, having grown up and lived there for 30 years - now a celebrity, a famous teacher. Initially he was greeted warmly and those in the synagogue were impressed by how well he spoke - but then this soon turned hostile.

This would probably have been the first time those who had known him all his life now heard him speaking – they just knew him as a working carpenter not a public figure.

They took exception to one of their own making such grandiose claims and identifying that the scriptures that had been read for over 700 years were now being fulfilled in their sight, that day, and that he was the Messiah heralded by Isaiah.

The Jews were famous for rejecting the prophets God Sent them! Jesus knew this and knew their hearts and that the vast majority would go on to reject him yet again. As we know in a short while his prophecy had come true and he was rejected and crucified.

His audience that day was also outraged that Jesus was implying that gentiles would enjoy God's blessings because the Jews would reject their prophet. They believed that they - the Jews - were God's chosen people and whether they sinned or not it was irrelevant.

The fact that no prophet is ever welcomed in his hometown was a common saying among Hebrews and Romans at the time. The people that know them best failed to see them for what they really were. Jesus realised that the people of Nazareth were so familiar with him that it was a barrier to them seeing Him as He truly was. Our equivalent phrase today might be "familiarity breeds contempt"!

They had heard he had cured the sick in nearby Capernaum and wanted him to do the same in Nazareth – but it is recorded that he could not do mighty works in Nazareth – unbelief was rife there. The implication is that if they had been open to the power of God working through Him he could have done much more there. They were quenching the spirit as Paul writes in Thessalonians Chp 5 – Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil.

One of the reasons for Jesus's rejection - I think - is drawn out further in Mark's version of this story.

Mark Chapter 6: "Where did this man get these things?" they asked. "What's this wisdom that has been given him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing? Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son?"

Nowadays saying Carol's son or Gilly's son etc isn't a problem - but in those times it would have been a very derogatory statement. They would always refer to someone according to who that person's father was. Even if the father had died. So it would have been normal to refer to Jesus as Joseph's son. Calling him Mary's son was a statement of derision, a very negative statement.

At that time Nazareth was a small rural Jewish community of around 300 people. It may well have been that the potentially scandalous events and intrigue surrounding Jesus's birth had left a shadow – perhaps Joseph was taking on someone else's son? Jesus may not have been entirely accepted by those he grew up with.

This whole story however is very reassuring not only for the early Christians who were being rejected by their Jewish neighbours - but also for us – take heart even Jesus was rejected by the people he had known and trusted all his life.

Members of our own family perhaps don't accept or understand our faith – those people who know us best may perhaps fail to see us for what we have become, they know us well, know our past and perhaps don't believe that we can have changed.

Being rejected is a painful experience – whether it's from a group, failing at an audition for a part in a play, not being picked for the sports team, not getting through an interview for a new job, etc. It hurts. And hurts all the more when it is by those we have known the longest – our family and the people who have watched us grow up.

Rejection can evoke sharp emotions – anger, outrage, self pity and hurt. We've all been rejected at some time or other.

And rejection is far easier to handle when it comes from those we don't like! The real test of rejection is when it comes from those we like, those we know, those who we desire acceptance from.

We can falsely believe that if we witness flawlessly and live perfectly everyone will like us – but this just isn't so. Even Jesus was rejected.

As John wrote - He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

Jesus's rejection by his own people did not deter him or discourage him – he moved on, he carried on.

His own advice to his disciples was if “any place will not welcome you or listen to you, leave that place and shake the dust off your feet”. We can't control how people respond.

So stop worrying and don't focus on what others think – seek to follow Jesus and the inner promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Let us pray - Dear Lord

We pray that we will always be open to hearing the views of others – especially those we have known for a long time.

Be with us if we feel we are being rejected, help us to carry on and listen to the peaceful voice of your Spirit within us, reassuring us, encouraging us and calling us.

Help us to love those who have rejected us - as you love us unconditionally. Amen

Carol Elsasser, 23rd Jan 2022