

Rejection. It's one of our biggest fears. Being rejected because of how we look, how we perform, what people think of us, or for what we believe. And that's the kind of rejection Jesus prepares his disciples for in today's Gospel - rejection for believing in him, speaking about him and living as a Christian. I don't know about you but I don't always find sharing our faith in Jesus Christ easy. And sometimes it isn't always easy to live as a Christian. It's not hard here on Sunday morning, it can be a lot harder for you where you live and work and go to school.

Someone inserted my mobile phone number in an advertisement in the Melbourne Age and other newspapers around the country last Saturday. All week I have had people around Australia ringing me about the fishing trawler I have for sale, the 10 tonne mobile crane and the scrap metal. 40 phone calls. After a while I thought I would use it as a small opportunity for God. I told them they had a wrong number but added "I am a pastor of a Christian church in Adelaide". Silence, embarrassment, apologies, laughter, or words that would make Gordon Ramsay proud, and then "clunk" greeted my small witness. They were happy to buy a trawler from me and were even happy to chat to me until they found out I was a Christian pastor. Noone wanted to know what I really had to give away for free!

Jeremiah experienced rejection. Big time. He was called to warn the people of God's judgement. In today's first Bible reading we heard him complaining to God. "It's all too hard. I am damned if I do and damned if I don't." He wanted to speak Gods word and felt an inner compulsion to share it but he was rejected, mocked and ridiculed for it. I guess that's what we are afraid might happen to us too.

Jesus warned his disciples that he was sending them out **"like sheep to a pack of wolves .. there will be people who will arrest you and take you to court, and they will whip you in the synagogues...people will hand over their own family to be put to death ... everyone will hate you because of me."** I don't know if you have experienced any of those things this week. I haven't, but maybe you have been out on a limb for Christ in some way this week and someone has threatened to cut it off, bring you down, belittling your faith, attacking your lifestyle. Or maybe they just don't care, unless you intrude on their lifestyle or challenge their thinking. Then they attack. Jesus said **"I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law - a man's enemies will be the members of his own household."** Maybe you experience that pain of rejection even in your own family circle by those you love most and want to see connected to Christ.

So, how do you deal with the threat of rejection for being a Christian, talking about God and living for him? Jesus says **"don't be afraid"**. The one who was rejected and arrested and tortured and laughed at and crucified for you says "don't be afraid". Three times he says it. Why not? I can see 4 reasons in these words of his to us today.

### 1. The truth will eventually prevail

**"So do not be afraid of them. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs."** People have always wanted to hide the truth and hide from the truth, especially the truth about themselves. Jesus says the truth must be told and will eventually prevail. The truth about who Jesus is and what he would do for the world, and the truth about human beings. The truth about our sin and the truth about how Jesus died to forgive and take it away and the truth about our response to him.

For a while we might have to put up with ridicule, and the abuse of people who think the Gospel is rubbish and you and I are ignorant fools. Jesus promises eventually all will be revealed. The things we see with the eyes of faith will be plain for everyone to see. The truth will win out.

The good news of God's incredible love for us and the world in Christ who died and was raised for us needs to be told and heard. That's our task as his church and as disciples of Jesus Christ. What we have heard and enjoy from Christ needs to be shared, not kept to ourselves, brought into the daylight, spoken of plainly, without fear. And sometimes it isn't that bad. Sometimes people have never heard the Gospel clearly. I asked two people this week what their picture of Christianity was. All they could say was having to do things like going to church, trying to live moral lives, keeping commandment. I was able to share with them that it is about relationship, and love and forgiveness from God. I don't know what the Holy Spirit is doing with that but I didn't get killed for it. In fact they were intrigued, as they had never heard that about the Christianity. Noone had told them it's all about Jesus, forgiveness, love. life and relationship with God.

### 2. God's power over you is greater than peoples'.

**"Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell."**

Sounds a bit scary on first reading as if it is saying "If you think what people can do to you is bad imagine what God can do to you in hell!"

But the comfort in the passage is that God's power over your life and his right to judge you is far greater than other peoples'. What often paralyzes us about "God talk" or living as a Christian is fear of how people around us will react. We don't want to lose friends, popularity or be seen as Bible bashers so we often retreat into our shell even when we are handed the opportunity to say something on a plate because we are afraid of people.

Jesus tells us not to be afraid of people. Their power over you is limited. They might reject you but they are really rejecting Christ. They can hurt your feelings, your pride and maybe even your body but they can't touch your soul. Christ is your only judge and he has the power of ultimate rejection that is hell. And the gospel says he will never reject you unless you ultimately reject him. He has the last word over your life and remember if he is on your side why be afraid of people and what they can do to you? The cross shows up the limits of human power. They killed Jesus. But it couldn't keep him down. God had the last say over Jesus and he does over us. They can kill you but God will make sure you don't stay down either. We trust Christ the last word and that is resurrection and life.

What counts is not how other people judge you but how God does. If we ought to be afraid of anyone it is God not people and God loves us, he judges in our favour, so why be afraid of people?

Sometimes we care more about what people think, especially our own families more than what God thinks. Jesus said what we think of him and he of us matters more than any other human relationship. **"Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me."**

### 3. God cares for you as his messengers

**"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows".** If God cares for the spoggies, the ordinary insignificant birds we often don't even notice, how much more will he care for and protect you who share the life giving good news of Jesus with the world for him?

I can't tell you not to be afraid. I get scared sometimes too talking about God. And sometimes I am afraid to take my chances. I especially hate having to warn people for God like Jeremiah did. I had to do that this week too. I always hold my breath for the reaction.

**"Perfect love cast out fear"** the Bible says and we are loved perfectly by God, cared for daily, loved to death on the cross, and especially cared for when we speak for him. That's Jesus' promise. I can't lose one more hair without God knowing and caring about it.

### 4. Jesus stands up and speaks up for us.

**"Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven."** There is a warning and an awesome promise here. Jesus already represents us in heaven. He calls us to represent him here on earth. To consistently deny knowing Jesus by our words and lifestyle may reflect rejection and that we have disowned Christ and Jesus warns us he may not own us before God. On the other hand the Christian who admits to knowing Christ and believing in him, however fearfully and with knees knocking can be assured that Jesus is standing before the Father in heaven saying "That's one of my disciples!".

His acceptance of us doesn't depend on how well we speak and live for him, that's not Christianity, and he won't reject you unless you reject him, but he calls us to stand up for him and stand out for him in some way and promises he does the same for us in heaven itself as we live by faith in him and let it show. Even if noone sticks up for us and our faith on earth Christ sticks up for us in heaven! That's all that matters.

Still afraid? Of course we are, Jesus anticipated it, and that's why he says don't be afraid three times and gives us 4 reasons not to be.

Because God's truth will eventually come out and must be told, because God's power over us is greater than people's and what he thinks about us more important than anyone else's judgement, because God cares intimately for his messengers, and because Jesus stands up for us in heaven, that's why we will go back into the world to live as his disciples and not be ashamed of it or afraid of people.

Jesus said: **"whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."**

It sounds like we've got nothing to lose and everything to gain as we put ourselves on the line to share our faith.