

No one likes rejection. It doesn't feel good, it can be disappointing, and sometimes can cause anxiety. But rejection is something all of us experience in our lives. It is not getting a job you applied for, or someone not listening to an idea or advise you gave, or a method of payment refused by a vender. There are deeper types of rejection. Like when a family rejects one of their own for having a different belief, religion, sexual orientation, or political affiliation. Or when a leader is rejected for making people uncomfortable. You get the idea, there are all kinds of rejection and they all can make us feel bad. And no one likes feeling bad.

Those bad feelings can manifest in the bitter and rotting fruit of vengeance and wanting to make everyone else feel bad by causing harm and pain. Hurt people, it is said, hurt people. That is how cycles of violence, toxicity, and abandonment continue to harm individuals and systems. But there are other ways to respond to rejection that can break that cycle of harm.

That is what we see in today's Gospel where Jesus was rejected. This is not the only time Jesus experienced rejection in the Gospels. Not everyone Jesus encountered was impressed by him or wanted to follow him. We heard in the Gospel last week how the people of a community were terrified of Jesus after they saw him liberate a man from the demons that had oppressed him. The people were so afraid they asked Jesus to leave.

Today's rejection is different. Before Jesus could do any miracles or tell a single parable, before he even arrived in a village in Samaria, the people who lived there rejected him. The Gospel says it is because he had his face set toward Jerusalem. Some scholars say this is simply a reminder that Samaritans followed a different type of Judaism and they worshiped God in a different place. When they learned Jesus was not of their kind of religion, they rejected him. Maybe that is the reason. Others suggest a more Christological reason as the author of Luke's Gospel is alluding to Jesus' crucifixion, death, and resurrection by saying his destination is Jerusalem and nothing will persuade him from altering his course. Not everyone thought Jesus should go where he would be in danger, they wanted him to follow a different path, one that would lead to a life of success, wealth, and power. Maybe that is the reason.

I believe the reason for the rejection isn't as important as how Jesus responded to it. Because rejection of Jesus is something the author of Luke wove throughout the Gospel, starting with Jesus' birth and how there was no room which is why he was born in an unusual place. Jesus was born into a world that didn't really want him because people preferred the world's brokenness, its love of power, wealth, and violence more than they loved God and each other. With rejection playing a role in Luke's Gospel, it is essential to notice how Jesus responded to it because it can teach us about God and ourselves.

Jesus did not respond to rejection with anger, throwing a fit, blaming those who rejected him, or vowing to seek vengeance. Neither did Jesus respond with anxiety nor did he try to change to conform to what he thought people wanted from him. He didn't apologize for failing to meet their expectations. He responded by accepting the rejection and moving on, even when his disciples had a different suggestion.

Notice in today's Gospel when two of Jesus' disciples, James and John, suggested calling down violent destruction to the people who rejected him, which is most likely a response that speaks to the anger and insult they must have felt, Jesus rebuked them. He not only said no, but he also rebuked their suggestion, which means violent punishment is not what Jesus is about. Jesus came to break the cycle of violence, not perpetuate it.

Jesus is not a bringer of more violence into a world that is all too familiar with it. Jesus brings healing that liberates us from violence.

This is an important lesson for Jesus' followers in the Gospel and for us who follow him today. The world, it seems, doesn't appear to change much over the years as there continues to be acts of violence like public shootings that result in trauma and the loss of life. In the wake of the Supreme Court's reversal of Roe v. Wade there have been reported threats of violence to both progressive and conservative churches. These threats come from deep emotional pain and fear and only perpetuate harm instead of creating peace and hope.

Today's Gospel along with our reading from Paul's letter to the Christians in Galatia remind us that although the temptation of violence is a common response to pain, there is another way. The way of Jesus. The way summed up in the 9 fruits of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Let's take a closer look at these fruits.

Love. Jesus loved even those who rejected him. That doesn't mean he always did what they wanted. But it does mean he listened and accepted their rejection like he did with the two people he invited to follow him in today's Gospel. **Joy.** Joy is not feeling exuberant happiness, it is feeling God's presence no matter what happens. It is what keeps Jesus from acting out in rage. **Peace.** Peace is not the absence of conflict, but the ability to ride out conflict trusting God is present no matter what happens and helps us to be patient even in turbulent times. **Patience** is waiting trusting that God's will eventually will be done. Patience is how we can endure setbacks and respect the dignity of every human being, especially those who we disagree with. **Kindness.** I ask you all to be kind with yourself and each other while we endure the ever-present pandemic. Kindness is making the generous assumption we are all doing the best we can at the moment, which in turn can help us be patient. The fruits of the Holy Spirit are connected, they flow into each other and out of each other like the Spirit itself, giving life and strength. Like **generosity.** Generosity is more than sharing resources. It is trusting each other with what and who we love, which means trusting each other with our hearts and souls as much as what we value like the books we lend each other. We can be generous in part because of **faithfulness.** Faithfulness is more than steadfastness. Faithfulness is what Jesus was talking about when he said the Son of Man has no where to rest, unlike foxes and birds. Faithfulness is a form of perseverance, holding on to what is important, like following God, and letting go of what is not. Faithfulness is how we can all grow when we make changes in personal beliefs. Like how my parents changed from being opposed to the ordination of women to the priesthood to being supportive of women's priestly ministry and leadership. This change helped them grow closer to God and each other which is why it is an example of the practice of being faithful and proves that sometimes being faithful to God means changing long held beliefs. **Gentleness** is one of my favorite fruits of the Spirit and I wish it was practiced more often. There is so much in the world that is harsh by nature like extreme heat and cold, and severe storms. There is a lot of harsh rhetoric in the media. Sometimes we face harsh realities with our health or bodies. In a world that can be harsh, gentleness is a refreshing expression of God's renewal of life. Gentleness can be a soothing balm to the anger that never seems to take a break. Gentleness can be the stuff that builds trust and gives hope because it is the opposite of causing harm and destruction. If you know someone who is hurting or angry or afraid, try being gentle with them. If you are hurting or angry or afraid, try being gentle with yourself. This might require some **self-control**, which is

another fruit of the Spirit. Self-control is the practice of considering how our words or actions might reflect the love of God before we speak or act.

All of these fruits of the Spirit are what we can practice instead of the temptation to cause harm or blame when we are hurt like after experiencing rejection. These fruits are not out of reach, they are not goals we must work toward. They are already ours; they are gifts we have been given by the Holy Spirit and through the presence of the Holy Spirit can participate in. That is why Paul calls them fruits. Unlike the bitter fruits of rejection, the fruit of the Spirit is full of the divine nourishing sweetness of God's healing, liberating love. When we accept and practice these ways of Jesus, we help break down those bitterly painful cycles of violence and harm and abuse by rebuking fear and vengeance and create a bit of hopeful sweetness of God's Kingdom of healing love for all people.

This work and practice never ends. Which is why we need to remember living by the fruits of the Holy Spirit is not just how we treat others; it is also how we treat ourselves. For when we work together, when we share the work, it feels less like a burden and more of a joyful connection of God in the world with us that can bring hope to those who need it, want it, and will receive it.