

God's Word comes to us from the 13th chapter of Luke, where Jesus says: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!"

Most of us are so familiar with the image of Jesus as the Lamb of God that we don't give it a second thought. But "Hen of God"? That's another story. In the words you just heard, Jesus compares his love for the people of Jerusalem to the nurturing, protecting love of a mother hen, draping her wings over her chicks. It is a tender, comforting image. And yet there is tragedy in these words. There is heartbreak. Jesus has tried to gather His children together, but they have rejected him.

Chances are, you have known the pain of rejection. Whether it's rejection in a relationship; rejection at your job; or the rejection of wanting something so much only to be passed by; we know how it feels. So just imagine, if you can, how the Son of God feels as he journeys toward Jerusalem—His holy city—the location of His Father's house, the Temple—and the reception he receives is rejection. He has come so that people—his people—can truly know God. He has come to bring forgiveness and a new direction. He has come to offer never-ending life to his people and all people. And the response is: No thanks, Jesus of Nazareth. We don't want you. We don't want what you're selling. Keep this up, Jesus, and things might get ugly.

Now, Jesus was not surprised by this rejection. He even said, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!" Perhaps He was thinking of Jeremiah, who in today's Old Testament lesson is threatened with death for speaking the Word of the Lord. Human beings can have strange, extreme reactions to God's Word of repentance and mercy, as Paul writes in today's Epistle: "For many...walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things." Enemies of the cross of Christ. Enemies of forgiveness and love. Enemies of all that is good. Rejection of Jesus is all around us. Pop stars try to recast Jesus in their own image in interviews. Fathers and mothers try to lead families apart from the wisdom and will of God. People crave power and control, despising those who promote the peace and forgiveness of Christ, who still desires to gather a people unto himself. He is not surprised by all this rejection.

But it still breaks His heart. The worst of it is, this is not just a message about how “those people” reject Jesus—it’s also about how you reject Him, and how I reject Him, people who really ought to know better.

How, you may ask, do I reject Jesus? Well, let me ask you: Is Jesus, the Son of God, the most important person in your life? Would you drop everything that you’ve worked for to follow his calling? Do you share your faith in Him with other people? Do you care for those who are worse off than you and look for ways to serve them? Do you try to live a life of purity and obedience to the Lord on a daily basis? Do you hunger and thirst for Jesus’ words, not to mention His body and blood given in Holy Communion, or are there other places you would rather be than a boring old church service? If you wrote down all the things you do in a given week, would they reveal that Jesus is your number one priority? Would He make the top five? I am willing to admit that I fall under the condemnation of these questions and that I have rejected my Savior in ways to numerous to mention. Are you willing to admit the same?

If not, I will pray that you wake up before it’s too late, because you are choosing a road that leads to personal destruction. If you are willing to confess and own your rejection of Jesus, I want you to listen to this. It’s going to sound too good to be true, but it is the Truth. Jesus is not surprised by rejection. And even though it broke his heart, he pressed on to Jerusalem to the hill outside the city wall where criminals were put to death. Jesus does not handle rejection like we do. When we’re rejected, we either lash out in anger, or more often than not we shut down, we curl up into a ball so that we don’t get hurt again. But not Jesus. He kept putting one foot in front of the other all the way to Calvary, in the face of the most bitter rejection imaginable. Where we help only our friends or those who can reward us for our efforts, Jesus helped those who hated him and prayed for their forgiveness. Where we would turn our backs to those who reject us, Jesus offered his back to the whip, absorbing the punishment for sin. Where we shut down and put self-preservation first, Jesus thought more highly of you than his own life. Rejection did not stop Jesus from proving his love for you. His wish came true. He gathers his children with outstretched arms—on the cross. He gathers his children with the wings of forgiveness and reconciliation. Though his arms are nailed fast to the wood, His love embraces the world. That love embraces you and me—people who have resisted and rejected Him—and what He wants most is for you to turn around and return the embrace. His arms are still open wide.

