

# Not Rejection, But Redirection

*‘These things I have spoken to you, while I am still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.’ (Jn 14:25-27)*

On my way back from a family funeral service for Nora Keuroghlian, God rest her kind soul, I passed a sign in front of a humble church with the phrase “God's ‘no’ is not a rejection but a redirection.” Funny that a sign on Curlew road can reveal wisdom for our everyday lives which also penetrates the depths of God’s relationship with humankind. As we talked about last week, I think we all start off in the life of faith expecting that God is on our team—the giver of all good things—and of course God is. But when we start to mature in life and faith, we face not getting some things from God. We face hardship in life, things don’t turn out just as we’d wish, we face sickness and even death. These ‘no’s from God feel like rejections and they shake us in our faith. But then comes a sign; “God's ‘no’ is not a rejection but a redirection.” How is the job you didn’t get, the relationship that didn’t work out, the child that won’t listen, an opportunity for redirection instead of rejection? Perhaps you need patience, more than your child needs obedience. Perhaps only the loss of a relationship will teach you not to take them for granted. Perhaps you need to trust more in God’s provision for your life’s work, and less on your resume.

I hope we can all take some time to meditate on the rejections we all have in our lives, and see how God might be moving us to redirection, reorientation to a greater trust in him. Because when we get stronger in this discipline, we will be more prepared for the one great rejection, the one ‘no,’ from God that we all must eventually face in this life, which is death. At some point, if you haven’t already, we will all pray to God the same prayer. Lord please grant more healthy years to my husband, my wife, my mom or dad, myself. And eventually the answer to that prayer will be ‘no.’ Life is God’s gift and he gives it to us to use for but a season. And as cruel and ugly as death can be, the heart of the gospel message for all humankind is that the great rejection of death, has become the great redirection. By the cross, Jesus has promised that those lost from this world have in reality come home to Him. Not rejection, but redirection.

That’s the reality we recalled in the past fifty days with the passion of Christ and the glorious coming of the Holy Spirit which we celebrate today on Pentecost. Recall that Jesus, the Son of God, the most true, beautiful and good life ever lived, was barbarically rejected, executed by the world. Aware every day of his approaching demise Jesus asks God in the Garden of Gethsemane ‘My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me.’ Father is there any other way out of this? The answer appears to be no. Yet it was not a rejection, but a redirection, that Jesus accepted obediently, ‘Yet not my will, but your will be done.’ On the cross, Jesus cries out ‘my God, my God why have you forsaken me.’ A feeling of rejection that I imagine we all will face as we let go of our lives. But Jesus’ words were not a rejection of God as commonly misunderstood, but rather a statement of faith. Jesus is praying Psalm 22 which begins ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ but ends faithfully declaring that ‘those who seek the Lord will praise him— may your hearts live forever! Not rejection, but redirection.

And now on Pentecost, 50 days after Jesus was executed, we can identify with His followers who felt abandoned by their leader, bereft of hope for better days to come. They keep asking Jesus to stay and pick up where they left off. They want to come with him to be with the father. In today’s reading Jesus does not reject the Apostles, but he redirects them. I will not wave a magic wand over this broken world and fix it for you, Jesus seems to be saying, God wants you to be part of the solution. No, I am not staying, and no you cannot come with me, says Jesus, but I redirect you with the power of the Holy Spirit. Now God will not just be for you as father, with you as brother, but within you as divine power. You will not stay in your comfortable, inward looking tribe of the first Christians, I am redirecting you on this day of Pentecost to the ends of the Earth. To ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.’

The key to a Christian life well lived, is to trust that any rejections in life, with trust in God, are meant to be redirections. A prayer unanswered, a wayward child, a divorce or death, can all be means of a deeper life and lasting joy only in close communion with our creator. From a broken down church sign on Curlew Road, to the great signs of Easter and Pentecost, all of life’s trials constantly beckon us to reorient ourselves to our triune God who is for us, with us and within us, now and always amen.