

How do we cope with rejection, with people being nasty to us? What does it feel like when people laugh at us and make fun of us? Sometimes people will try to ignore us, push us to one side, pretend that we don't exist.

God's special messengers, his prophets and saints are none too popular either. Even as God commissions them and gives them their job to do, and knows that it is going to end in failure, or certainly what looks like failure. "*I am sending you to the Israelites, the rebel who have turned against me.*"

And the, poor old St Paul. What is this '*thorn in the flesh*' that he must endure? This '*angel of Satan to beat me and stop me from getting too proud*'? Was it some physical illness? Was it some terrible temptation? Whatever it was, it quite clearly brought him to his knees.

Even Jesus, when he returns home, is despised and rejected. Local lad made good, he should have been fêted and applauded. Instead, he is sidelined and ridiculed.

In the Collect, we prayed "O God, who in the abasement of your Son, you raised up a fallen world." God doesn't sit on a throne issuing orders. He doesn't create a perfect world where everybody does what they are supposed to do. And he certainly doesn't make all his prophets and saints immediately successful. That would be far too easy and boring.

God speaks to us in failure, in humiliation, even in the complexity of this very strange and sometimes frustration world. This is how God makes space for us. This is how God touches our humanity. This is how God appeals to us, how God makes us his brothers and sisters together in the struggle.

"*My power is at its best in weakness,*" says God to Paul. The way in to holiness, the way in to peace of mind is precisely weakness, failure and abasement. There's no room for a yuppie success culture in the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are all failures, and it is in the acknowledgement of that failure that we will find real power.

Ezekiel's ministry to the Israelites might end in seeming failure but at least they will *know there is a prophet among them*. Paul may have to endure *in such hardships, persecutions and agony*. But he also knows that it is when he is weak that he is strong. Jesus' ministry ends in the failure of a public execution. But it is that public execution, that abasement, that raises up a fallen world and draws us all into the heart of God.

Fill us with holy joy and bestow upon us eternal gladness, Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.