

In composition or speech writing the first and most difficult step is to choose a topic. You can write or talk on anything; there's too much to choose from. That's very different from a field like popular music. Turn on the radio anytime night or day and almost every song you hear will be about the same topic: love. You don't hear many songs about politics, vitamins, or pesticides. Musicians have only twelve notes they arrange and rearrange to come up with a song. And they have only one topic to explore. But the topic of love is so vast that you can explore it in a million different ways.

The story of love is not always a story of joy; it's also a story of pain. In many songs the singers complain that the person they love does not love back. Sometimes people we love do care about us, but they don't express it. That's annoying. Sometimes people we love actually reject us. That's depressing. Mothers, you know all about this. We all do.

There's a love story in today's first reading. It's not between two people, but between two communities: Christians and Jews. Paul and Barnabas set out on mission to Antioch, way up north of Jerusalem near the border of Syria and Turkey. They talk to the Jews about Jesus and many of them become Christians. The love story begins. But then some Jews reject the Christian message and hurt Paul and Barnabas.

So here's their dilemma. They love these people; they want to share the news that excites them. But many are not receptive, and some reject and hurt them outright. What do they do? What do we do when people we love reject us? We mope. We brood. We wonder why they don't ask us why we're so depressed. And that makes us more depressed. So we set boundaries on our willingness to love ever again.

But, here's what Paul and Barnabas do. They do none of the above. In fact they release the limits of their love, and start preaching to Gentiles. Their first love was to Jews, to their own family. But when that faltered, they started loving more. They preached to those who were not Jews.

Did that make them feel 100% better? I doubt it. I believe they always hurt. But sharing their love with others improved their own self-esteem and the lives of those they touched.

Today is Mother's Day. It's also a world day of prayer for vocations. Whoever you are--mother, priest, religious--if service and love are part of your life, rejection and pain will be there too. The advice we get from the apostles today deserves a popular song: Love someone else, even when you hurt.