

Jesus spoke in parables, but he made his subject clear - the kingdom of heaven. The scenes changed, but the theme remained consistent. Jesus' message was that God extends a gracious invitation to people to participate in his kingdom. Accepting the invitation leads to joy, while rejecting leads to punishment. When Jesus spoke of God's kingdom, he spoke with authority. His stories convicted because he knew his audience. His parables have a universal character; they make the hearer or reader ask, "If this parable is about everyone, I must fit here somewhere. Which character in the story represents me? Those for whom the parables were immediately intended usually felt their sting.

The King then extended his invitation to everybody, Jews and Gentiles, the good and the bad, the rich and the poor. Some of the specially invited guests refused to come while others abused the servants who brought the message. The servants in this parable seldom receive much attention in sermons. They certainly got a mixed reception from those they approached with the Good News. But they delivered their message anyway. It is a glorious truth that every person is invited into the Kingdom of God. Come as you are! God accepts us as we are but loves us far too much to leave us as we are. God's love will never let you go. God calls you to a life of love and service. Follow it in faith every day. Then comes that difficult final part of the story. The king found a fellow at the party who was not wearing the proper attire, and kicked him out. You probably are thinking: if the king was tolerant enough to let anyone come to his party, why would he get pushed out of shape over what they are wearing? St. Augustine, a great church leader of the Fourth Century, has helped us at this point. He explained that each person who accepted the king's invitation was given proper attire for the banquet. The king was aware that poor people would not have proper clothing for such an occasion. Not wanting anyone to feel inferior, the king provided standard clothing for all the guests to wear. But this fellow was a rebel at heart. He disregarded the generosity of the king and decided to come on his own terms. St. Augustine believed that trusting in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord is what constitutes the proper wedding garment. If you are not humble enough to admit your need for the salvation he offers, if you are not grateful enough to accept it, you cannot come to God's party. The only person who cannot experience God's forgiveness is the one who thinks he has no sin. The only person who cannot be saved is that one who feels no need for a Savior. Jesus does not exclude us. If we reject his offer, we exclude ourselves.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills... 1 Corinthians 12:4-11. On page 855 of the Book of Common Prayer in the Catechism we are asked, "Who are the ministers of the Church?" The ministers of the Church are lay persons, bishops, priests and deacons. Notice that lay persons are listed first. We are all Ministers, just with different roles.

For by the grace given to me I bid every one among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith, which God has assigned him. For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them..." Romans 12:3-6

Those who invite others to meet Jesus will still experience rejection. It will take both forms - active and passive. None of us enjoys rejection. We usually take it personally. The more carefully we make the invitation to meet Christ clear and appealing, the more we feel the impact of a rebuff. Are you a servant? Your challenge remains the same: Faithfully deliver the message God has given you. Trust him for your safety.

People might ask, "If everyone's called to serve, then why are only some ordained?" Ordained ministry is more than a call to serve the church, it is the call to be the church's servant. Ordination is not about being recognized and validated; it is about recognizing and serving Christ in the "least of his brothers" For many are called, but few are chosen. Those who are called but reject God's invitation will be punished, as will those who seem to accept the call but fail to follow through. The use of the word "called" means "invited," not the irresistible call of God as Paul used it. The invitation had gone out to all of Israel, but only a few had accepted and followed Jesus. "Chosen" refers to the elect. Jesus was applying this teaching to the Jews, who believed that because they were descendants of Abraham, they would be sure to share in the blessings of God's kingdom through the Messiah. But Jesus taught that not all those invited would actually be among the chosen of God. As Jesus had noted earlier, "Wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow is the road that leads to life, and only a few find.

Looking back, I know I received invitations and ignored them as I did not realize what they were for. Once I received another more deliberate one, I responded, Here I am Lord, and my life changed forever. Following two years of preparation and study, I said yes once again and was ordained to The Sacred Order of Deacons on October 14, 2000. I have served at St. Luke's for these many years.

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go forth and bear fruit - fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask of him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another. John 15:16-17

Amen.

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