

Part 4: The Usual Response

Spend a few minutes in silence to unwind and come to yourself fully in this moment. Share with the group something from the week that relates to God's invitation to you. (20 minutes)

Because of the conditions with which life came to us, a common response to God's invitation is one of disbelief. Having never experienced completely unconditional love and acceptance, we cannot understand what this means.

Every aspect of our lives has always had a price tag attached to it, so we instinctively become suspicious as we receive this invitation from God. Where is the catch? What are the hidden costs?

Most of us cannot believe in ourselves, in our innate worth, enough to let go and to open to God. We hold on to the securities and means of survival – our established techniques for ensuring we are acceptable and will not be deserted or rejected. We play the religious game if need be and try and do all the right things, but there is a deep ache in us, a sense that if 'they' (and God) knew what we were really like, they wouldn't feel so cheery about us. They would see that we were rather plain and unattractive and not worth much after all.

Our deepest fears of irrelevance and rejection freeze us into maintaining our facades and pretences and our double agenda which gives us ultimate control and a way out should our worst fears materialise. We are trapped by our fears and forced to play out our lives on empty hope and with 'outfits' and masks to suit different needs and situations.

As T S Elliott put it: 'My life is measured out in coffee spoons . . .' our personhood is lost to meaningless routines.

Even in the Christian Church, where one would expect more openness and freedom, norms and expectations are set which one cannot avoid without awkwardness. Because we persist in our pretence and allow only the acceptable side to show, it is very difficult to be our whole selves.

We feel that if our faith were real, there would be no difficult sides, and so we exert more effort to 'be' what we think we should be. The real self, however, is progressively lost. Whenever we try to be and feel what others need us and want us to be, we lose ourselves.

Exercise

Do you feel awkward accepting generosity from others (especially if you really need it)? If so, reflect on the attitude underlying this feeling. Reflect on the sides of yourself that few people, if any, know about.

Journal and share as appropriate, and continue to be sensitive to your 'masked' self through the week.



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