

If you are a member of the police force, the fire department, emergency responders, or any other group that protects and saves, would you please stand? Thank you for your service. No one wants to think about the worst that can happen, but someone has to. Life is beautiful, but life can be dangerous.

The Roman army invaded the city of Jerusalem in the year 70 to put down a Jewish revolt. The attackers even slaughtered religious leaders. The Roman emperor Titus raided Jerusalem's Temple, hauled away its precious treasures and leveled the building to the ground. Today all that remains of the Temple is its Western Wall. The terrorists who destroyed that holy shrine devastated people's sense of safety, as groups such as ISIS do today. It was unthinkable. But it happened.

A few decades earlier, standing in Jerusalem shortly before he died, Jesus told a wild parable about a wedding gone wrong. As his life was coming to an end, so was the Temple. So he tells about a king preparing a wedding banquet for his son. Some of the invited guests come, but others go back to work. Still others treat the servants delivering the message as if they were lifelong enemies. The servants kill the messengers. The king retaliates by burning the city of the very people he invited. He finally tells his servants to invite everybody left to the wedding. One person shows up wearing the wrong clothes, and the king throws him out. Jesus summarizes the parable this way: Many are invited, but few are chosen. More completely, many are invited, some come and some refuse. Of those who come, only some may stay.

Jesus is prophesying the end of the city of Jerusalem. God sent prophets to invite people into the kingdom, but only some responded. Others ignored the prophets; some mistreated and killed them. Those who did not respond suffered their own sorrows. The kingdom of God became open to all - not only to Jews, but to Gentiles as well. However, after you say yes, you still have to observe certain rules or you suffer the consequences.

In our neighborhood, we have people who have lived here a long time and others who arrived recently. We have tourists and transients. Some of the people who come here enjoy all the neighborhood has to offer. Others cause damage. Most who live here obey the rules; some do not. For all these reasons we need help to maintain law and order, to keep us from falling into danger, and rescue us when we do. We are immensely grateful to police officers, firefighters and emergency personnel who keep our city civil. But they need our help too. They need us to obey the law and to report crimes and suspicious behavior when we see it. No one wants to think about the worst that can happen. But we must. God is inviting us to respect one another. We will rejoice when we do.