

FUNKY DEAN OF ADMISSIONS

(Matthew 21:23-32)

Intro: Will Willimon.

- Methodist pastor.
 - #Author.
 - #Speaker.
 - #Gifted preacher.
- Campus pastor.
 - #Duke University.
 - #For many years.
- Now a bishop.
 - #In the United Methodist Church.
- Was asked what he missed most.
 - #About academia.
 - #No longer being a campus pastor.
- He said:
 - #"That's easy."
 - #"I really miss the Dean of Admissions."
 - *"With the Dean of Admissions,"
 - + "I could be pretty certain that everyone on campus was:"
 - = "Gifted."
 - = "Qualified."
 - = "Motivated."
 - *"As bishop,"
 - + "I can't take any of those things for granted."

Maybe it seems like the church has a funky Dean of Admissions.

- Tax collectors and prostitutes.
 - #Going into the Kingdom of God ahead of us!
 - *Matthew 21:31.
- That's not right.
 - #There must be something wrong with the Dean of Admissions.

I. Shouldn't The Kingdom Of God Have Higher Admission Standards?

A. University Of Wisconsin Is My Alma Mater.

1. I was reading in my alumni magazine recently.
 - a. *On Wisconsin.*
 - b. Only half of all applicants are admitted to the university.
 - Only 40% of those ever enroll.
 - Only about half of those will end up graduating.
 - #Many dropping out because of:
 - *Academic reasons.
 - *Financial reasons.
 - *Personal reasons.
 - Made me wonder about the admissions criteria.
 - #Why aren't they better predictors of academic success?
 - *Who belongs?
 - *Who will thrive in that environment?
 - *Who will stick it out?
2. When I was a high school senior.
 - a. Wisconsin was the only university to which I applied.
 - b. I thought about applying to Harvard.
 - With no intention of going there.
 - Just to see if I would be admitted.
 - #But the \$50 application fee.
 - *Or however much it cost 43 years ago.
 - #More than I could afford.
 - *Just for my ego.
 - +Or maybe my ego would have been deflated.
 - =If I hadn't made the cut.
3. If colleges and universities have strict admission standards.
 - a. Shouldn't the Kingdom of God have even higher admission standards?
 - b. How is it that tax collectors and prostitutes get in before us?

B. Tax Collectors And Prostitutes Were The Bottom Of The Barrel.

1. Tax collectors were invariably cheats and thieves.
 - a. Palestine at the time of Jesus.
 - Ruled by the Romans.
 - #Romans weren't very popular.
 - *Imposed their rule against the will of the people.
 - +Enforced that rule with the presence of their military.
 - *Sucked the tax money out of the country.
 - +Sent it to Rome.

- b. Romans were clever when it came to taxes.
 - Didn't collect the taxes directly themselves.
 - Engaged in tax farming.
 - #Selling tax-collecting privileges.
 - *In a given region.
 - *To local entrepreneurs.
 - +Who paid a franchise fee directly to the Romans.
 - =Up front.
 - +Who then put the squeeze on their fellow citizens.
 - =To reimburse themselves.
 - For their initial investment.
 - =Whatever they collected over and above that.
 - Their profit.
 - c. Tax collectors were notorious:
 - Cheats.
 - Thieves.
 - #Read the story of Zacchaeus some time.
 - *Luke 19:1-10.
 - #To see how detested tax collectors were.
 - *They were regarded as "sinners."
 - +Big.
 - +Bad.
 - +Bottom of the barrel.
 - =Sinners.
 - #So how could they be going into the Kingdom of God?
 - *Ahead of us.
 - #There must be something wrong with the Dean of Admissions.
2. Prostitutes were prostitutes.
 - a. Sex for profit.
 - b. More sinners.
 - Big.
 - Bad.
 - Bottom of the barrel.
 - #Sinners.
 - c. How could they be going into the Kingdom of God ahead of us?
 - There must be something wrong with the Dean of Admissions.

II. At The Very Least We Might Expect That Admission To The Kingdom Of God Would Be Limited To Those Who Have Their Hips And Their Lips Headed In The Same Direction.

A. Jesus Tells A Parable.

1. Man had two sons.
 - a. Actually the Greek says:
 - Two children.
 - b. But female children would not have been sent into the vineyard.
 - In that culture.
 - In that day and age.
2. He sent each into the vineyard.
 - a. First.
 - Said "no."
 - #With his lips.
 - But said "yes."
 - #With his hips.
 - b. Second.
 - Said "yes."
 - #With his lips.
 - But said "no."
 - #With his hips.
3. Which one?
 - a. Did the will of the father?
 - b. Passed muster with the Dean of Admissions?
 - In the Kingdom of God.

B. Which Kind Of Person Do We Prefer?

1. If we're a hospital patient in a great deal of pain.
 - a. Nurse who says she'll be right back with our pain medicine.
 - But then doesn't return.
 - *Forgetting our request.
 - *Getting sidetracked with other:
 - +Patients.
 - +Things.
 - b. Nurse who lectures us about the addictive properties of medication.
 - But who promptly reappears with:
 - *Our shot.
 - *Our pill.
 - c. Which do we value most?
 - Words.
 - *Or the actions.
 - Lips.
 - *Or the hips.

2. If there are two couples.
 - a. One who gets married.
 - Exchanging vows.
 - #Making promises of love and faithfulness to each other.
 - *In front of:
 - +God.
 - +Witnesses.
 - But then not living up to their vows.
 - #Abusing one another.
 - *Emotionally.
 - *Verbally.
 - *Physically.
 - #Being unfaithful.
 - *One to the other.
 - b. Other who decides to live together.
 - Without the benefit of a wedding.
 - #No vows.
 - #No promises.
 - *Not publicly, anyway.
 - But who treat one another:
 - #Caringly.
 - #Lovingly.
 - #Supportively.
 - c. Which do we value most?
 - Words.
 - #Or the actions.
 - Lips.
 - #Or the hips.
3. If we're planning a church activity.
 - a. One person says:
 - “I'll be there.”
 - “I'll take care of it.”
 - #But never:
 - *Shows.
 - *Follows through.
 - b. Another person says:
 - “I just can't promise that.”
 - #But who then:
 - *Shows up.
 - *Pitches in.
 - c. Which do we value most?
 - Words.
 - #Or the actions.
 - Lips.
 - #Or the hips.

III. What Is The Dean Of Admissions To Do?

A. If We're The Dean Of Admissions.

1. We don't want either/or.
 - a. Words.
 - Or actions.
 - b. Lips.
 - Or hips.
2. We want both/and.
 - a. Words.
 - And actions.
 - b. Lips.
 - And hips.
3. Is that too much to ask?
 - a. People who say what they do.
 - b. And do what they say.
 - Nurses who promise pain medication.
 - #And then deliver it.
 - Couples who publicly promise love and faithfulness.
 - #And then deliver it.
 - Church members who promise help and support.
 - #And then deliver it.
4. We want everyone to be like us.
 - a. Or at least to meet our standards.
 - b. What we think:
 - Nurses should be like.
 - Couples should be like.
 - Church members should be like.
5. But we are not the Dean of Admissions.

B. Jesus Is The Dean Of Admissions In The Kingdom Of God.

1. Jesus has the same admission standard for all.
 - a. For tax collectors and prostitutes.
 - As for the chief priests and elders.
 - b. For church members.
 - As for non-members.
 - c. For those who lead with their lips.
 - As for those who lead with their hips.
2. That standard is faith.
 - a. To believe.
 - Jesus is Lord.
 - On the cross Jesus opened his arms to all.
 - #Even to tax collectors and prostitutes.
 - #Even to you and me.

b. When we believe.

-We will be continually growing into people.

#Who say what we do.

*Who do what we say.

#Whose hips are aligned with our lips.

*Whose lips are aligned with our hips.

-We will be continually growing into people.

#Who recognize:

*We are not the Dean of Admissions.

*Jesus looks into hearts.

+In a way that we cannot look.

*Jesus sees people.

+In ways we don't always see.

*Tax collectors and prostitutes.

+May very well go into the Kingdom of God ahead of us.

Concl: As we Rekindle the Fire.

-Our process of congregational renewal.

Our #1 goal.

-What more people pledged themselves to work on.

-What I called:

#Telling Our Story.

-In retrospect.

#I think I got that wrong.

#I think I should have said:

*Telling God's story.

Jesus.

-Never invited anyone:

#To come to church.

#To become a church member.

-Always invited people to believe.

As we tell God's story.

-Individually.

-Collectively.

#Our #1 goal.

*Not increased:

+Worship attendance.

+Congregational membership.

+Financial support.

=Although these things will come.

-If we are telling God's story.

*But rather that even tax collectors and prostitutes.
+May meet the Dean of Admissions.
=In the Kingdom of God.
+May believe in the Dean of Admissions.
⁼⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard
equality with God as something to be exploited,
⁷ but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born
in human likeness. And being found in human form,
⁸ he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of
death— even death on a cross.
⁹ Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the
name that is above every name,
¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in
heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.
- Philippians 2:6-11.

What more could we ask for?

-To know the Dean of Admissions.