

Daily View

“But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today’” Hebrews 3:13

June 2, 2020

Behind a Mask

I have a long history with masks. My birthday is on October 31st so my birthday parties naturally came with a lot of masks. When I was very young, I thought everyone in the neighborhood was celebrating my birthday and giving me treats, which was very nice of them (my favorite back then was homemade popcorn balls — that’s a blast from the past! Can you imagine sharing popcorn balls in this age of Covid-19?).

While masks are occasionally associated with fun — and cuteish raccoons — masks raise more negative connotations than positive ones. Terrorists and criminals wear masks. On a ski slope it’s fine, but you don’t want a man in a ski mask in your house. And, these days, many people are wearing masks because a terrible disease is dominating our life.

Then there’s the Bible connection: the Greek word *hypokrites* — translated “hypocrite” — means “from behind a mask.” The idea comes from the masks used to depict dramatic plays. And, in one of Jesus’ most explosive speeches, recorded in Matthew 23, he said that those who were abusing religion for their own self-aggrandizement are hypocrites, children of hell, taking others with them (see Matthew 23:15). Living your religion “under a mask” is an incredibly dangerous thing to do.

A mask played another role in a Broadway musical that became wildly popular in the mid-80s and 90s. I’m not a big fan of musicals but Christie very much wanted to see “The Phantom of the Opera” when it was making its rounds in the early 90s. In 1991, we were living in Orange County and our 22nd anniversary was coming up on September 5th. I was having trouble deciding what to get Christie for an anniversary gift and then it hit me: I’ll get tickets for a future performance of “The Phantom of the Opera” at the Music Center in Los Angeles.

And though it would likely be months before we could go, I’ll get the tickets and put them in a card and I know she’ll be very happy with that. So, I called the ticket office on September 4th to order the tickets. The ticket lady put me

on hold for awhile and I began to think they were sold out into the distant future. However, when she came back on the line, she said to me, “we actually have two seats available for tomorrow’s matinee performance, if you would like to go.” Of course, I said, “Yes! That would be wonderful.”

Not only did we get tickets for the next day but the seats we got were in the Orchestra section, row F, right in the middle of

the auditorium. Almost perfect. The people next to us were talking about how they got their tickets four months before. I almost felt guilty.

That’s the side story: Back to the mask point, as you undoubtedly know, the Phantom in the play wore a mask on one side of his face to hide a terrible disfigurement. It was symbolic, because it was also hiding a disfigured, ugly soul. The story is kind of weird. It’s a love story and it seems we are supposed to feel sorry for the Phantom, even though he was really a sinister guy — he was a murderer. **But... he could really sing!**

The music *is* fabulous; I bought the whole soundtrack and listened to it repeatedly and still listen to some of the songs.

My point, I guess, is that unless you are working in a hospital or enjoying a party, you probably don’t want to wear a mask.

Today, at least for awhile, we are being encouraged and, in some cases required, to wear a mask. The purpose is not to have fun, or to keep from being recognized or to hide disfigurement of the skin or soul. We are being encouraged to wear a mask for the benefit of other people during this health crisis.

I don’t like wearing a mask. I don’t even like the idea. If wearing a mask was about keeping *me* from getting the coronavirus I probably wouldn’t do it. I would do what I’m doing now — just don’t go out, especially not to places that require a mask.

But, when we get back to attending services, I will wear one, when I’m not preaching. Why? Not for me, but for my brothers and sisters. I don’t want to be responsible for making anyone else sick, and that’s a risk right now that none of us should be willing to take. After all, like Christ, we live for others, right? The Bible says we should:

- Matthew 22:39 “The second is like it. Love your neighbor as yourself.”
- Matthew 7:12 “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”
- I Corinthians 13:5 “Love does not insist on its own way.”

And this, in Philippians 2:3-4,

- Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Let’s do what we have to do to stay healthy and keep others healthy. This thing will pass and we can get back to normal and the sooner the better. If we have to wear a mask, so be it; it’s worth it.

