

October 31, 2010  
Rev. Dr. Steven H. Koski  
“A Time to Surrender Your Masks”  
Psalm 139.1-14

I love Batman! Underneath the costume and mask, he is the one superhero that doesn't possess supernatural powers. He has a lot of amazing gadgets, a phenomenal butler and a really cool car. But, underneath the costume, he was just another human being. In fact, the last Batman movie, the Dark Knight, portrayed him without the mask as a very flawed human being with a dark side.

Hollywood would have us believe we need to put on a mask and be someone other than who we are. We need to be a superhero to do good and change the world.

Our culture encourages us to wear a mask and hide our real selves...that part of us that is scared, flawed, hurting, confused, weak, imperfect. We don't want people to see who we really are.

Do you ever wish you were somehow different than who you really are/ I some times wish I was more of an extrovert? I wish I had more musical talent. I often wish my body shape was different. I wish I could write better. I some times wish I was more daring and was like one of those extreme athletes who have no fear.

Do you ever wish you were some one other than who you really are? The problem is when I want to be some one else I struggle accepting myself just as I am and trusting that as I am, I am enough.

We're encouraged in our culture to wear masks. We don't want people to see who we really are – the flaws, warts, insecurities, failures, fears, imperfections.

I fear some times we think we need to be superheroes in our faith.

We wear masks hiding the fact that some times we get it and some times we don't, some times we feel strong and some times we don't, some times we feel close to God and some times we don't, some times we remember to pray and often we wonder what it really means to pray, some times we read the Bible and often struggle to make sense of the Bible, some times we are loving and often we are impatient and angry, some times our faith feels strong and often it feels like the ground is shaking underneath us.

And we assume we are the only scared, flawed, doubting, imperfect ones so we wear masks and pretend everything's ok.

Have you ever felt like you just don't do Christianity right? You spend your time worrying about what you haven't done, what you're not doing and how simply you're not enough.

Some one convinced us that Christianity is all about perfection. There's a verse in Matthew 5.48 that has been translated "Be ye perfect." Wow! Are you kidding me? Be ye perfect. Now that's a heavy load. We've bought into that and as a result millions of folks like us have been swallowed up in a fruitless chase after perfection causing incredible personal despair because we can never attain that goal, we can never measure up to that standard.

We are perpetually not good enough. It wreaks havoc in our relationships because we end up measuring people against a standard they can never live up to and we want them to be some one else rather than accepting them as they are.

Here's the thing. For centuries, the Greek word Teleios has been wrongly translated as "perfect" ...be ye perfect. A more accurate translation for that word is "whole". We're encouraged to be

whole. Trying to be whole is a far cry from trying to be perfect. In fact, to be whole is to acknowledge, own and embrace our imperfections.

The Psalmist in today's reading said it is God who made you just the way you are. You are fearfully and wonderfully made. It said there is no where you can go apart from God's Spirit. God desires to be with you. It also said to God there is no dark and light. To God darkness is light. In other words, there's no reason to hide those parts of us we want to keep hidden. God accepts you just as you are. God doesn't say clean the house first and put out your best china and then I'll come visit. God desires our messy, imperfect lives just as they are to be a dwelling place.

We don't need to be a superhero. We don't need to be any one else. Our flawed, messy, imperfect lives are somehow part of God's grand story.

Hollywood writes a script that calls us to put on our mask and cape and be some one other than who we are.

God has written a very different story. In some ways, the polar opposite.

God as the casting director who is looking for the heroes and heroines of God's story and has a fondness for the imperfect and flawed.

Look at the company Jesus preferred to hang around...the unacceptable, the unwelcome, the misfits, the broken.

Look at who Jesus chose to carry out his mission...ordinary folk, fishermen who didn't seem to even be very good at that as the Bible says they were fishing all night without catching a thing.

They never seemed to understand what Jesus is talking about. They always seemed perplexed. When Jesus died they had no clue what to do next.

If you ever are concerned that somehow your flawed, imperfect life is not enough to be part of God's story, read the bible and be reassured...you are enough, just as you are.

We don't somehow have to get our acts together, be a little more perfect and acceptable for God to show up. God is already present in our messy, tangled, imperfect lives and it is our messy, imperfect lives that God wants to use to heal the world. God doesn't demand perfection. God simply desires our heart. One of my favorite Peanuts cartoons starts with Lucy at her five-cent psychologist booth, where Charlie Brown has stopped for advice about life.

"Life is like a deck chair, Charlie," she says, "on the cruise ship of life. Some people place their deck chair at the rear of the ship so they can see where they've been. Others place their deck chair at the front of the ship so they can see where they're going." Lucy looks at Charlie brown and asks, "Which way is your deck chair facing?"

Without hesitating, Charlie replies glumly, "I can't even get my deck chair unfolded."

Charlie Brown and I are soul mates. Most of the time I feel I can't get my deck chair unfolded.

But here's what's absolutely shocking. What landed Jesus on the cross was the preposterous idea that common, ordinary, broken, inconsistent, imperfect, screwed up people were precisely the company God chose to keep and were precisely the characters God chose to entrust God's dream and God's story.

What drove Jesus' enemies crazy were his criticisms of the "perfect" religious people and his acceptance and deep love of the imperfect nonreligious people.

We are invited to take off our masks, and welcome and embrace the extraordinary news that God enjoys your company just as you are and God has chosen you to be a key character in God's great love story to the world.

I love the story of the young boy who was walking by a pet shop on his way to school. The boy stopped and stared through the window. Inside were four black puppies playing together. After school he ran home and pleaded with his mother to let him have one of the puppies.

"I'll take care of it, Mom. I will. If you can just give me an advance on my allowance, I'll have enough money to buy one with my own money. Please, Mom, please."

The mother knowing full well the complications a new puppy would bring to a busy household, could not resist her son. "Okay, you can get the puppy, but I will expect you to take care of it."

"Yes, Mom, I will." Filled with excitement, the little boy ran to the pet shop to buy his new puppy.

The pet shop owner brought him to the window to choose his puppy. After a few minutes, the young boy said, "Um...I'll take the little one in the corner."

"Oh no," said the shop owner. "You don't want that one. See how he just sits there. He was born with something wrong with his leg. He can't run and play like the rest of the puppies. Choose another one."

Without saying a word, the boy reached down, lifted his pant leg to expose a chrome leg brace to the owner.

“No,” the boy said firmly, “I’ll take the puppy in the corner.”  
It turned out that what disqualified the puppy from being chosen by others is what most qualified him to be chosen by the little boy.

It is so hard in our culture where we are expected to prove our worth to trust and believe in the amazing, unqualified Grace of God. God loves us if we can get our act together, be a little bit more perfect, prove we are worthy of that love.

But it turns out that what we often think disqualifies you and me – our flaws, our brokenness, the messiness of our lives, our imperfections – is what most qualifies us to be the perfect dwelling place for God and most qualifies us to be chosen to have a role...a key role in God’s incredible story of redeeming the world with love.

In the book of Genesis, during the week long process of creation, Yahweh pronounces the results as “Tov”...which is Hebrew for beautiful...very good. Not perfect but beautiful and very good. And one writer said the word “good” in this biblical context means entirely adequate to its purpose.

Our flawed, imperfect selves are ‘good,’ “beautiful.” You are enough. You are fearfully and wonderfully made.

As cartoonist Ashleigh Brilliant puts it, “I may not be perfect but parts of me are excellent.”

I’d go even further, not just parts of us are excellent but the very core of us is excellent, beautiful, good, more than adequate to be and do what we were created to be and do.

It may be fun dressing up as a superhero but we can take the mask off because we're not asked to be superheroes. We're asked to offer God our whole selves...our hearts...and allow God to use our imperfect lives to transform the world in love.

An elderly Chinese woman had two large pots, each hung on the ends of a pole which she carried across her neck.

One of the pots had a crack in it, while the other pot was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water.

At the end of the long walks from the stream to the house, the cracked pot arrived only half full of water.

For two full years this went on daily with the woman bringing home only one and a half pots of water.

Of course, the perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments. But the poor cracked, flawed pot was ashamed of its own imperfection, and miserable that it could only do half of what it had been made to do.

After two years of what it perceived to be bitter failure, it spoke to the woman one day by the stream.

"I am ashamed of myself. I am not good enough. Because of this crack in my side water leaks out all the way back to your house." The old woman smiled, "Did you notice that there are flowers on your side of the path but not on the other pot's side?"

That's because I have always known and accepted your flaw, so I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we walk back, you water them."

“For two years I have been able to pick those beautiful flowers to decorate the table. Without you being just the way you are, there would not be this beauty to grace the house.”

“For two years I have brought flowers to people who have been sick, grieving or just lonely. Without you being just the way you are, they would not have experienced this love and beauty in the midst of their pain.”

Hollywood is in love with the superhero.

God has written a different story and God has chosen imperfect you to be the heroes and heroines of God’s story of redeeming the world with love.

God doesn’t demand perfection. God simply desires your heart. When you put your whole selves into God’s story, God works miracles even...the likes of us.