



SOUTHSIDE

MIDWEEK NEWSLETTER

7.22.20

Mask'd Up – Barrett

During my shift at Trader Joe's this past Thursday, I had a conversation with a woman in my line that took a very awkward turn. The conversation started well. I asked her what she was doing this week and she responded by sharing with me about a soccer camp that all three of her young children were attending. I always love talking about kids and sports with customers, so I rather excitedly replied, "That's awesome! What are your kids ages?" She replied, "Two, five, and eight." I was amused by the thought of a two-year-old at a soccer camp and so I followed up by asking, "Are they all playing?" I was simply wanting to make sure I heard her correctly and that even her youngest child was participating at this camp. And to my surprise, she responded with, "Well, yes, I am pregnant, how did you know?"

Just in case you are wondering, I know better than to ask a woman if she is pregnant. I would never ask this question to a woman I know well, let alone a complete stranger. As comedian Brian Regan rightly points out, "If you are wrong, then there is no coming back from that." That said, my story illustrates a breakdown in communication. In this instance, the breakdown can be specifically attributed to the difficulty of being understood while wearing a mask. As I attempt to talk to people in my line, I have often thought about the old string telephone game I used to play when I was a kid. My brothers and I would connect two cups together by a string and then my older brother would speak into one of the cups while my younger brother and I would put the second cup up to one of our ears attempting to understand what he was saying. I never could understand him.

As difficult as it is to communicate while wearing a mask, I would like to suggest that this time of wearing masks remind us of the communication skill most needed in our society: listening. In James 1:19 (NLT), we read these wise words that are just as relevant today as they were two thousand years ago, "Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry." Oh, if we would only allow for this to be the guiding principle for all of our communication with one another. Instead, we are generally slow to listen, quick to speak, and even quicker to get angry. It is part of our fallen human nature to not want to listen to what anyone else has to say. Yet the challenge of James is to become a people who are more and more available to listen and less and less hasty to speak.

So, wearing a mask reminds me to talk less and to listen more. A mask does not hinder my ability to listen well. I can still fully listen with my ears and my eyes. One of my wife's favorite sayings in our home is "Listen to me with your eyes." This is usually spoken when she has someone's ear but not someone's attention. There is a wonderful quote that has been attributed to several different people that says, "Being listened to is so close to being loved that most people cannot tell the difference." People are longing not just to be heard, but to be understood. May those of us who are followers of Jesus Christ grow in our ability to listen well. As I like to remind my children, God has given us two ears and only one mouth for a reason.

Continuing Through Cluelessness – Evan

As we try to plan for a new year in campus ministry—a new year that starts less than a month from now!—I find myself with more questions than answers on most days. Connecting with students who want to make a home of campus ministry during their undergraduate years has plenty of challenges under normal conditions; in the middle of a pandemic, it can feel downright overwhelming.

I know that I am hardly alone in feeling this way. The unprecedented moment we currently find ourselves in leaves us with countless unanswered (or insufficiently answered) questions. We have no idea what “normal” looks like over the next year. Easy answers sometimes seem available, but as soon as you get into the details, more questions rise to the surface.

Maybe it’s at least mildly comforting that we are no strangers to cluelessness. We know how it feels to have no idea what we’re doing. We know how it feels to have no idea what’s next. But we do the best we can, and we trust God to handle what we can’t. Times when we have the least control can be the most impactful in growing our trust in the Lord. May now be such a time for us!

A few years ago, Danielle shared with me this prayer by Thomas Merton. I have kept it ever since, but I find it to be especially relevant these days. I hope that you might be blessed by it and find it useful as well:

“My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.”

A Shepherd’s Prayer – Richard

In 2 Chronicles we read the wonderful story of Solomon building the first temple in Jerusalem. This was something that David had wanted to do, but something that God reserved for his son Solomon. In chapters 2-5 we read the preparations Solomon for building the temple, the size of the temple, the construction materials for the temple, the sections of the temple, the furnishings placed in the temple, and the Ark of the Covenant being brought to the temple. Then in chapters 6-7 we read Solomon’s prayer of dedication for the temple and about the dedication of the temple.

After this is completed, we read these words in 2 Chronicles 7:12-15 – ***Then the Lord appeared to Solomon in the night and said to him: “I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a house of sacrifice. When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayer that is made in this place.*** In context, this passage is a clear reminder to the Israelites to humble themselves, pray, seek Him, and turn from their sin. These were necessary prerequisites for the Israelite nation to be in a right relationship with God, and it was only after they met those prerequisites that God would hear their prayers, forgive their sins, and bring healing to their land.

While we should be careful about extrapolating this passage to be an applicable recipe for us to use to solve all that is going on in our world today (Coronavirus, social and racial unrest, political discord, a culture rejecting God, etc.), I do believe this passage provides a lasting framework that we can adopt to have an abiding relationship with God, both individually and collectively as a church. And who knows, perhaps if all of God’s people throughout the world humbled themselves, prayed, sought God’s face, and turned from their sins, many of the problems we are currently experiencing might go away.

Holy God and our Father in Heaven, help us to desire to seek you and live a life that is worthy of the great gift of grace, mercy, and salvation you have given us. In Christ’s Holy Name I pray, Amen.