

From the moderator

For some months we have been getting used to the wearing of masks. Moreover, it seems more and more people will be wearing masks, in more and more situations.

Of course Masks are nothing new, The British museum has a whole collection of masks from around the world. They take the forms of animals, humans, spiritual figures, or mixtures of them all. There are even masks for the dead, as golden masks found on the faces of two bodies from ancient Nineveh reveal. The last faces these two people showed to the world as they were buried.

The oldest masks in the world have been found in Yorkshire, in a waterlogged site called Star Starr. No less than 24 stag skulls, converted into masks with antlers attached and two eye holes cut in the frontlet. It is thought they were used by shamans in religious rituals, but who really knows what was in the minds of those people who lived over 11,000 years ago.

Some masks are symbols of power designed to create fear like some of the helmets worn by kings and soldiers in ancient and medieval armies. Others are designed to help disguise a criminal or a terrorist like the famous latex mask of Richard Nixon beloved of Film makers, or the black balaclava worn by members of the Islamic state group. Yet others are designed to make a statement like the Guy Fawkes masks worn by anti-establishment activists, or the Greta Thunberg masks worn in environmental protest marches.

Some masks are designed to protect the wearer, like the gas masks in world war two, or the masks used by craftsmen and women who are working with noxious fumes, dust or asbestos. Some masks are simply for fun, like the carnival masks, or the animal masks made by children.

However, some masks have a very different role. The masks we are wearing, are certainly not for fun nor are they meant to frighten others. Moreover like the masks worn by surgeons, nurses and care workers They are not to protect us but to protect others, against the danger we might pose to them.

It seems that it that sense God chose to wear a mask when he spoke to his servant Moses, because to do otherwise was to put Moses in danger. He says:

You cannot see my face, for no-one may see me and live.

After speaking with God, Moses also took to wearing a face covering. The writer says.

When Moses had finished speaking with the people he put a veil over his face.

God later told the priests to bless the people with a very special blessing, we call the Aaronic blessing. We use it regularly in church to this day

The Lord bless you and keep you;

the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you;

the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace.

The fervent hope in that blessing is that we shall somehow see the impossible. That which even Moses was denied, the gracious face of God himself and in that seeing, we shall know his perfect peace.

Which is why John writes with amazement about his experience of seeing Jesus:
That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.

John had seen in Jesus the very face of God.

The bible then tells us that one day the words of that ancient blessing will be completely realised for every one of us and all masks will be taken away:
For now, we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

May God bless you and those you love, especially through this continuing difficult time

David