

Trinity 2 (Refugee week) 21st June 2020
Matthew 10.24-39
On-line pre-recorded service Bradford Cathedral

The last few months I have learnt about things I never expected.

For instance, a year ago I had never heard of Covid19, the R number, the 2-meter rule or social bubbles.

And up a week ago I had never made a triple lined face covering in order to go on public transport – but now I've made several.

I'm very proud of my little facemasks, they have taken a lot of work because I'm not used to sewing and I didn't have a pattern.

But, in a strange way they remind me of what it's like to follow Jesus.

To begin with, in order to make my mask, I had to study pictures of masks and read about what would be the best fabric, how many layers and what type of elastic to use. I had to understand how they would be used and what would make them comfortable, the size and the fit,

To follow Jesus you've really got to know him...not the fluffy romanticized hero who makes for a good bedtime story.

No the real Jesus, the Jesus we read about in scriptures, who loved us completely, who was passionate about men and women in equal measure, who valued every human being regardless of race or

age or gender, whether they were social outcasts, ill, disabled or had mental health problems.

Every single one mattered and still matters today.

Jesus did not care for the misuse of human power, condemned injustice and called out those who did not care for the poor and the marginalized.

And the same Jesus, when arrested, spat upon, scourged and beaten did not retaliate, but forgave.

Forgiving those who hurt us is really tough and painful and takes great courage and even greater love.

To follow Jesus, means we have to know him, to love him and love what he loves – each other.

Secondly, wearing a mask is uncomfortable.

Following Jesus is at times uncomfortable and difficult. Jesus faced a lot of opposition from those in authority and those who rejected him because he wasn't what they wanted.

Ultimately, this opposition led to his death on the cross.

Jesus warned his followers that following him would be dangerous and it was.

In the Acts of the Apostles chapter 5 the Disciples are flogged for the first time for telling people about Jesus and healing people.

Their response as they left the courts was to rejoice, because their hearts were filled with joy at knowing they were doing what God wanted.

Following Jesus and telling people about Jesus through words and actions will bring conflict, and sometimes even within families.

But the conflict is ultimately about bringing in the kingdom of God, a better world where righteousness and justice wrapped in grace-filled love is God's ambition for us all.

In the news this week was the remarkable story of Aristides de Sousa Mendes, a catholic middle-aged, mid-ranking Portuguese diplomat in the Second World War, whose grace-filled loving actions dramatically changed the course of history for many.

Portugal was under the right wing dictatorship of Salazar, the regime had decreed that visas could not be given to the refugee Jews or stateless people other than from Lisbon, in effect trapping the Jews.

Aristides knew this was wrong and that they were in very great danger. He sunk into deep depression as he watched more and more Jews fleeing from Nazi occupation in Belgium and France arrive in Portugal. On the 13th June 1940 the moral crisis overwhelmed Aristides who had a nervous breakdown. After 3 days in his bed, on 17th June, he emerged a changed man, according to his son "he strode out of his bedroom, flung open the door to the chancellery, and announced in a loud voice: **'From now on I'm giving everyone visas. There will be no more nationalities, races or religions'.**"

His actions cost him his livelihood and left him penniless, but he saved 1000's of lives.

Aristides sacrificed his own worldly comforts to bring life and hope to others, and in doing so walked in the steps of Jesus.

Thirdly, wearing a mask is about keeping the community safe, by stopping the spread of any germs I may have when I am out in public.

Following Jesus is about bringing in Kingdom of God values.

God's heart is for all creation, all humanity and every creature on the earth, in the sea and in the air, everything that makes this world glorious and His intention is for all to flourish, but this can only happen when we follow His way.

The two greatest commandments sum this up perfectly, to love God with your whole heart and to love your neighbor as yourself.

Many of you have been living some of these values as you have taken food and friendship to your neighbors.

Loving your neighbor as yourself, is not an unrealistic utopian fantasy, it is attainable, but only if we recognize that every one matters and every one is of supreme value in God's eyes.

Truly loving our neighbor means we cannot remain neutral over matters of injustice or discrimination.

Wearing a mask does not silence our voice. And God wants us to use our voices to proclaim His love and to make the world a better place.

Our words are powerful and used wisely bring friendship, healing, hope, forgiveness and transformation.

And finally, wearing a mask is something you have to decide to do. It is a conscious decision.

Following Jesus, is a conscious decision taken in the knowledge that it will be risky and costly.

We wear our faith for all to see, even if it might mean rejection.

But unlike the mask, we will not remove it at the end of the day.

Following Jesus requires great courage and even greater love.

For by learning to love and cherish those who are different from ourselves we will discover the world is a much better and richer place for the diversity, which God our Father already delights in.

So my prayer for all of us is that we will see each other as God sees us with compassion and love and a longing to see justice and righteousness for all.

God bless you all with his peace and his joy and stay safe. Amen.