

Sunday 21st November 2021

'What Are You Hiding', led by Ann Kader

Opening music - haunting pipes from Riverdance

<https://youtu.be/9LLB4LRQ3Jk>

Picture - Sculpture by Rose Simpson – 'Reclaiming our identity'

Rose Simpson is from New Mexico and her pottery addresses concerns like colonialism, racism and capitalism. It is confrontational. The piece of pottery that was shown was about finding our identities and our empowerment in our histories

Welcome and opening words by Dawn Buckle

We open ourselves to worship today.

May the peace of this house bring us calm,

May the joy of this hour make our hearts glad,

May the challenge of the hour awaken our courage,

May the communion of this hour confirm our togetherness.

1st hymn - purple book no.68 - I dream of a church

I dream of a church that joins in with God's laughing
as she rocks in her rapture, enjoying her art:

she's glad of her world, in its risking and growing:

'tis the child she has borne and holds close to her heart.

I dream of a church that joins in with God's weeping

as she crouches, weighed down by the sorrow she sees:

she cries for the hostile, the cold and ho-hoping,

for she bears in herself our despair and dis-ease.

I dream of a church that joins in with God's dancing

as she moves like the wind and the wave and the fire:

a church that can pick up its skirts, pirouetting,

with the steps that can signal God's deepest desire.

I dream of a church that joins in with God's loving
as she bends to embrace the unlovely and lost,
a church that can free, by its sharing and daring,
the imprisoned and poor, and then shoulder the cost.

God, make us a church that joins in with your living,
as you cherish and challenge, rein in and release,
a church that is winsome, impassioned, inspiring;
lioness of your justice and lamb of your peace.

Story

The reason I chose the title of this service was because of a woman I read about. This woman didn't hide her true self at all. I've always been fascinated by her. Some years ago, I was in Cullompton and I went in the big church there. I can't even remember what the church was called, but I picked up a leaflet and in it was a short piece about God's Odd people. This woman didn't hide her true self. I'd just like to share her story.

Her name was Margery Kempe, a medieval woman from round about the same period as the much more famous Julian of Norwich, to whom at one point Margery went for spiritual advice. Both women were mystics - hearing God through dreams and visions and both were of course devout; but there the similarity ended. Margery was quite definitely the sort of person you don't want to get stuck with on a holiday tour bus - a very relevant comparison, as it happens. After bearing fourteen children and then allowing her long suffering husband to take a vow of chastity before the Bishop of Lincoln, she spent a lot of her very adventurous life on pilgrimage. Extravagant displays of devotion were common in those days, but she was over the top even by the standards of the time. She was weeping and wailing and falling to the floor.

Why did the person writing this leaflet like her so much? She never learned to read or write so she would never have been able to study theology even if she, as a lay woman, had been permitted to do so. She was questioned many times by the Bishops. This was a frightening period.

She really lived her authentic self, she did what she felt she had to do. God made good use of her and she had no masks. The writer says that we may all be odd or damaged but if we show our true selves, we would all sparkle with the individuality of with which God created us.

The writer does finish by saying that she was looking forward to meeting Margery in heaven - but hopes she doesn't have the heavenly mansion next door.

Prayers

Our first prayer is a Himalayan Buddhist prayer.

May I always be a lamp unto myself

May I always rely on myself

May I hold fast to the truth as to a lamp

May I always see liberation only in truth alone

Sutta Nipata is a Buddhist scripture.

May all creatures abound in health and peace May all be blessed with peace always.

All creatures weak or strong

All creatures great or small

Creatures unseen or seen

Living afar or near

Born or awaiting birth

May all be blessed with peace

And a prayer by Richard Rohr which I go back to again and again. I have used it many times in my services.

Loving God, you fill all things with a fulness and hope that we can never comprehend. Thank you for leading us into a time where more of reality is being unveiled for us all to see. We pray that you will take away our natural temptation for cynicism, denial, fear and despair. Help us have the courage to awaken to greater truth, greater humility and greater care for one another. May we place our hope in what matters and what lasts, trusting in your eternal presence and love. Listen to our hearts' longings for the healing of our suffering world. Knowing, good God, you are hearing better than we are speaking, we offer this prayer in all the holy names of God.

First reading Masks - by anon _____

Don't be fooled by the face I wear, for I wear a thousand masks. And none of them are me. Don't be fooled, for goodness sake, don't be fooled.

I give you the impression that I'm secure, that confidence is my name and coolness is my game, and that I need no one. But don't believe me. Beneath dwells the real me in confusion, in aloneness, in fear. That's why I create a mask to hide behind, to shield me from the glance that knows.

But such a glance is precisely my salvation. That is, if it's followed by acceptance. If it's followed by love. It's the only thing that can liberate me from my own self-built prison walls. I'm afraid that deep down I'm nothing and that I'm just no good. And that you will reject me.

And so begins the parade of Masks. I idly chatter to you. I tell you everything that's really nothing and nothing of what's everything, of what's crying within me. Please listen carefully and try to hear what I'm not saying. I'd really like to be genuine and spontaneous, and me. But you've got to help me. You've got to hold out your hand. Each time you're kind and gentle and encouraging. Each time you try to understand because you really care, my heart begins to grow wings, feeble wings, but wings. With your sensitivity and sympathy and your power of understanding, you alone can release me from my shallow world of uncertainty.

It will not be easy for you. The nearer you approach me, the blinder I may strike back.
But I'm told that love is stronger than strong walls. And in this lies my only hope.
Please try to beat down these walls with firm hands, but gentle hands, for a child is
very sensitive.

Who am I, you wonder....

I am every man you meet, I am every woman you meet, And I am also you.

Quiet reflection followed by music

Second reading The Root of the Root of yourself, by Rumi ———

Don't go away, come near.
Don't be faithless, be faithful.
Find the antidote in the venom.
Come to the root of the root of yourself.
Moulded of clay, yet kneaded
From the substance of certainty,
A guard at the Treasury of Holy Light -
Come, return to the root of the root of your self.
Once you get gold of selflessness,
You'll be dragged from your ego
And freed from many traps.
Come, return to the root of the root of yourself.
You are born from the children of God's creation,
But you have fixed your sight too low.
How can you be happy?
Come, return to the root of the root of yourself,
You were born from a ray of God's majesty
And have the blessings of a good star.
Why suffer at the hands of things that don't exist?
Come, return to the root of the root of your self.
You are a ruby embedded in granite.
How long will you pretend it's not true?
We can see it in your eyes.

Come to the root of the root of your self.
You came here from the presence of that fine Friend,
A little drunk, but gentle, stealing our hearts
With that look so full of fire; so,
Come, return to the root of the root of your Self.

Address

Are you hiding your true self?

Most of us do in some way or other.

Since birth we have added layer after layer - son/daughter, husband/wife/partner, mother/father, worker/non worker, sporty, not sporty and on and on we go. Even our accents are adapted to fit in. I taught in a very multi cultural school in the East End of London and I was brought up in the East End. Education always has fashions and at that time dialects were being acknowledged and accepted in schools except for cockney as it was looked down upon. So of course, to get good jobs cockneys adapted our dialects. This is called code switching and when I go back to the East End I use my cockney accent.

Really it is a mask and used as a way of fitting in. Do we hide behind our masks because we are frightened of fitting in or we think people won't like or accept us. To expose our true self can make us vulnerable which is scary. Are you just really yourself when no one is looking?

About 20 years ago, when reality shows on TV were in their infancy, a young man called Alex who was very upper class and Oxbridge educated applied to be on one. In the show he was first shown at his country home and on his horse. His task was to be a bouncer in a London nightclub. To do this he had three advisors - one for kickboxing, a voice coach to teach him a London working class accent and a security expert. He also had to live on the 15th floor of a Council block in London for 15 months before the show.

He wasn't athletic, he spoke with clipped tones and was frightened in London but that didn't deter him.

After the show, the person interviewing him asked " Did going on the show change your understanding of who you are?"

"Yes, completely "

He realised that he had been following what he thought he was and the life he thought he was meant to have. He didn't have to be son, brother, grandson. He said he realised he could actually be himself, he hadn't realised before that he was lost. Anyway he flew to Australia and starting working immediately with the AIDS Council running a needle exchange service. He had become a more confident person because of the show. He worked a couple of nights in a pub.

He says he became free of his back story and was more able to be me, and able to be more. There is more to this story but will take too long to tell but he has been happily married to Clinton for 19 years and still living in Australia.

A friend of mine who has passed now, a monk, in fact he married me when I was 18. He had been a monk for over 20 years. It's what he had always believed he was meant to be and being his true self but one day someone gave him a series of four books called The Masks of God. After reading them he left the monastery and became an atheist. He realised he had been living a lie for all those years and wasn't being true to his authentic self. I don't know about this as he carried on serving the community until he died.

Of course, we have always used masks to hide. We have recently had Halloween where masks were worn to hide, in this instance usually for fun. In many cultures animal masks are worn to call on their spiritual power. Social media can be a great place to hide, not always in a good way. The wonderfully romantic masquerade ball in Venice is a great way to hide your true self by wearing those amazing masks.

So what is your true self, who are you really?

Are you hiding behind one of the above masks?

Are you hiding your true self, are you frightened to reveal your true self. Do you often

think you'd like to be like that other person - Kurt Cobain said " wanting to be someone else is a waste of the person you are".

Your thoughts and feelings throughout childhood would likely have been expressions of your true self, depending of course on that childhood. You probably thought you were special and you are. Each one of us as I've said before has God's DNA in us. From childhood we quickly learned to act and behave in certain ways for approval. Meditation and nature helps us back to remembering our special roles and purpose in this life. Rediscovering who we are apart from the roles we play takes time, courage and showing our vulnerability. It may be difficult to separate your true identity from the one you have created. Once you start to do this you will find a light and spiritual peace within.

There is a prayer starting with...

May I trust my own goodness

May I see the goodness in others.

Once we understand this, perhaps we can allow ourselves to be vulnerable and let our true self show, even if only a little because we are all part of the Divine's plan. Teilhard de Chardin talked about Humankind and the collective humankind ... let's journey together for the knowledge of who we are really. We journey together for greater consciousness, the shared power of the holy.

We are not separate....we are Humankind, a collective of souls.

"until we find each other, we are alone"

Let us set aside our masks as often as we can...

And rejoice in belonging to the Human Collective.

One of the most famous unmasking was in Star Wars when Darth Vader was dying and was being held by his son. When he took off his helmet, he showed a much more vulnerable human being rather than the scary presence of Darth Vader.

Let us occasionally feel brave and let the mask fall.

Final hymn - purple book no 24 - Come Sing a Song with me

Come, sing a song with me,

come, sing a song with me,
come, sing a song with me,
that I might know your mind.

And I'll bring you hope when hope is hard to find,
and I'll bring a song of love and a rose in the wintertime.

Come, dream a dream with me,
come, dream a dream with me,
come, dream a dream with me,
that I might know your mind.

And I'll bring you hope when hope is hard to find,
and I'll bring a song of love and a rose in the wintertime.

Come, walk in rain with me,
come, walk in rain with me,
come, walk in rain with me,
that I might know your mind.

And I'll bring you hope when hope is hard to find,
and I'll bring a song of love and a rose in the wintertime.

Come, share a rose with me,
come, share a rose with me,
come, share a rose with me,
that I might know your mind.

And I'll bring you hope when hope is hard to find,
and I'll bring a song of love and a rose in the wintertime.

Words and music by Carolyn McDade. Arranged by David Dawson
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Benediction Words by John Midgley

Friends

Thank you

Thank you for being here

Thank you for your singing

And your silence,

Your presence and your prayers.

For it is by your being,

That we all can know the depth of Being. It is by your singing and silence,

That we can know a unity in togetherness. And it is by your presence,

That we can know that other presence, Here

Being together

Thank you

Amen

Final music - Village by Paul Weller

<https://youtu.be/gtiwCIhkqJE>