

Time after Pentecost – Lectionary 15
Vicar Cheryl A. Korte

Saturday and Sunday, July 11 and 12, 2009
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Mark 6:14-29

Many of you have heard me speak of our home in Minnesota. We lived in an 1898 blue Victorian with a white wrap around porch. We remodeled the inside and out in efforts to restore it back to that era. We enjoyed our newly remodeled library with coffered ceilings, ceramic fireplace, glass cupboards, and wall to wall bookshelves. The backyard was a garden to behold with a gazebo in the middle of a rainbow of colored flowers. We put many hours of labor and love in to that garden.

We also spent hours entertaining, relaxing, or simply taking in the beautiful nature under the old oak trees, the orange and red maples, and blue spruce. The backyard was serene, almost enchanting prompting us to share this beauty with others. We decided to throw a Costume Themed Party and each year thereafter chose a different theme requiring our guests to dress accordingly.

On the last Friday of July every year for seven years we chose from themes such as the era of the 40's, the 60's, and the Wild Wild West. At first, only a few of the invited came in costume. Some simply showed up, enjoyed our costumes, and wined and dined on the feast. Yet we all enjoyed an evening filled with crazy drama, music, and laughter. By the seventh year everyone was arriving in costume and donating to the cause.

We enjoyed getting together with many of our friends, meeting new friends, and learning more about one other. Some of our guests were so intrigued by this theme party they adapted almost too well to their costume's character. And a few never stepped out of that mode the entire evening. It was fun to watch John and Jackie Kennedy encounter Marilyn Monroe or Robin Hood strut around in tights bearing bow and arrow.

I can't quite put my finger on it, but there is something about wearing a mask and costume that transforms a person. This past year at Trinity, I have been known to wear a costume or two as well. I admit to experiencing new heights as I walked in someone else's shoes. It was a delight to join the pirates' Vacation Bible School last summer, retell the Christmas story through a grandma mouse, and walk in the shoes of Bathsheba and Rahab.

These masks are harmless and can often be educational. An inner character emerges or perhaps it is the comfort of being behind the mask which makes it so appealing. It is like being given permission to exhort one's inner self or be someone else for a short while.

There are masks, however, we want to avoid, such as those which conceals our true intentions or seemingly posits a hidden agenda. Someone like Herod, who, when among friends and family, he hid behind his status of royalty, his power and authority.

Mark tells us Herod feared John the Baptist. He liked to listen to John whom he thought to be holy and righteous. Yet Herod masks the instinct to do what is right and instead takes the easy way out. He succumbs to peer pressure and to self preservation.

Seemingly a complex human being, I imagine Herod to be a man who bore inner frustrations; torn between protecting John the Baptist and keeping his promise to a young girl; wanting to listen to John's preaching, but leaning toward doing what would keep him regal in the face of his guests. In the end he'd rather save face than save a life.

We are constantly subjected to making similar decisions. As adults we are responsible for upcoming generations. As our children are exposed to a variety of worldly images, we have to decide what is proper and what constitutes too much promiscuity and violence. We literally hold our children's future in our hands. Though not intentional, we may be blind to ratings thinking PG13 movies are fit for young adolescents. We even have to be ware and monitor children's television shows. The internet, a global phenomenon is both a constructive and destructive persuasion as it flows into the privacy of our homes.

And while I have nothing against text messaging, *MySpace*, *Facebook*, or *Twitter* ...we want to be careful as to not submit to the ways of the world. Scrutinizing our children's activity on the internet is part of our parental duty. We take responsibility by writing congress asking for improved laws and we may peruse a movie before our children view it. Yet we are overcome by the constant pressure of succumbing to popular opinion.

As we attempt to monitor all that which bombards our families 24/7, we look to God for reassurance. Through this journey God equips us with the armor we need to lead us through decision making, maneuver through the mayhem and disorder in the world. Whether close to home or far away, when inundated by the needs of many and wanting to help ease the pain of those who suffer endlessly, we are confident a silver lining surrounds our despair with hope and promise of a better tomorrow. When we put all our trust in God our eyes are opened to the proper response. Rather than clouded by material influence, overwhelming odds, or the feeling of solitude, we hold on to the power of the Holy Spirit - a force which never leaves us.

Seven times in today's text, the writer of Ephesians tells us, we are God's chosen; we are destined by God. Through the waters of baptism, adopted by God, we are cleansed from sin and "clothed with Christ" (Gal 3.27). It is in this holy attire designed specifically for each one of us, that God gives us a divine mask as invitation to see through God's eyes both the suffering and the beauty of the world simultaneously.

Walking with God in prayer, devotion, and scripture prepares us and sustains us. "I listen to what God the Lord is saying" says the psalmist. As you know the labyrinth is just one of the tools outfitted with God's grace. Walking the labyrinth magnifies God's voice and intentions as God clothes us with the proper attire specific needs. And thanks to you Trinity and Mt Calvary Episcopal church there is now a labyrinth nearby.

Through encouraging words, donated monies, and many prayers we now have the opportunity to prayerfully and physically examine God's will for us. The labyrinth offers us a path to walk where we can find comfort and peace. The only masks and costumes are divine given inspirations opening doors for greater opportunity to serve God. I truly believe an inner character emerges within each of us reflecting Christ-like features when we walk this closely with God.

You know our garden back home had circular stone paths leading throughout – similar to that of a labyrinth – this may have been part of the reason we found such peace and harmony there. This and the newly built labyrinth are comparable to the path I have taken with Trinity. Walking with you this past year has put perspective in my life, as I sought direction, and brought thanksgiving to God. Just as the center of the labyrinth connects our most inner self with God, so I have found comfort being part of your community. Now that I leave Trinity, in retracing my steps back to the seminary, much like that of a labyrinth, I am filled with new awareness and new energy.

Through this you helped me discover my weaknesses and my strengths. Yours is a generosity I will never forget. Thank you for taking this walk with me. I truly hope you will discover the intimacy of the labyrinth allowing it to be part of your spiritual stroll with God I have witnessed the majesty of our God...because you are in Christ Jesus – you have believed in Him and you are marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit. Amen