

Series: Too Messy – “As Yourself”

Sermon: Two Faces

January 17, 2016

Introduction and Announcements

Good morning. My name is Todd Layne and I work in the area of discipleship. We want to get you connected to God and others. When you connect, we think you are going to grow and we want you to grow. Let me quickly tell you about 3 opportunities to connect and grow. On January 31, we are going to have our Starting Point Lunch. It will be right after the 11 am service. This is for anyone new to Capital City. A free meal will be served by one of our Life Groups and you will have the opportunity to meet the staff and learn a little more about Capital City. On Monday, February 1, we will be having Life Group Connection in the Loft. We are doing this one a little different. We have specific groups we are looking to create. We hope to create a group for 20 something's, young married, men and women. We are looking for 10 – 15 people in each of the groups. I am going to guide the groups for the first 3 weeks; then we hope to launch the groups on their own. One final opportunity. If you are married, we are going to be partnering with Northeast Christian Church in Lexington to have a retreat in Gatlinburg, TN. The dates are February 12-14. The theme is called Refresh. You can find out the details and cost of the retreat by stopping by the Serve Desk. Also, stop by to sign up for Starting Point or Life Group Connection.

I am going to be speaking to you today, but before we begin, why don't you watch this video.

Too Messy: Lean in to the Mess. This has been our theme since the fall of 2016. Hopefully, you understand what it means to lean in. But now, we are going to talk about “how to” lean in. The title of this series is called “As Yourself”. It refers to Matthew 22:36-39. An expert in religious law comes and tries to trap Jesus by asking this question: “Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?” Jesus replied, “You must

love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

This is where the title “As Yourself” comes from. Jesus wants me to love others like I love myself. What if my capacity and ability to love others would be determined by the way I love myself? Some of us know we would be in trouble, because we don’t love ourselves; therefore, we cannot love others no matter how much we want to.

Last week, Doc introduced us to 2 paths that are in front of a Jesus follower: Pleasing God and Trusting God. They both sound good, but we learned they are very different paths. You learn more what Pleasing God is the longer you are on the path. You learn a whole lot more about Trusting God when you walk this path for a while.

Both of the paths ultimately lead to 2 rooms: The Room of Good Intentions and The Room of Grace. What sounded similar back at the crossroads, now seems different. Let me remind you of the rooms.

The room of Good Intentions is filled with lots of people. The room was ornate and looked really pretty. It is kind of like this chair. Really pretty; really fancy, but not all that comfortable. It looks good on the surface, but it doesn’t really satisfy. The people look really good and they have done some really good things trying to please God, but their eyes look tired. If you look deep enough you see glimpses of loneliness, fear and pain.

The Room of Grace is a little more simple. It has a natural beauty. You can see the furniture, a recliner that I could lay back and sleep for hours. The people are laughing and when you look in their eyes, you see joy and you sense that everything is ok. These people still make mistakes, but somehow they have learned to accept who they are and what they do.

Now where I want to spend our time is in the Room of Good Intentions. That is where so many more people were. That is where the party was.

Everybody looked good and seemed to be having the time of their life. So let's go back to the Room of Good Intentions.

When I arrive at the Room of Good Intentions, I knock on the door and I'm greeted by a very attractive hostess. She shows me into the room and everybody seems to be having a great time. She asks me, "How are you doing today?" I tell her that I'm kind of confused and struggling because I've been trying to figure out these two paths and these two rooms and she quickly puts her fingers to her mouth and says shhh! In fact, the entire room quiets down when I say that I'm kind of confused and been struggling a little bit. She quickly ushers me over to what I think is a coat closet to give me a tie because maybe, I'm not properly dressed. Instead, she hands me a mask. I ask her what this is for and she says, "This will serve you well in the room of good intentions." So, I put my mask on and I begin to walk around the room. I see all the attractive people that look so good and have done so many good things, but I realize they are wearing masks too. I ask how they're doing and they say, "Just fine, just fine." They tell me about their family and they're fine. I ask, "Do you have kids?" They are fine too. But when I look deeper at their eyes, their eyes look tired and lonely. There seems to be a deep pain. They are longing for something more. It is a façade of comfort; you live with a tension that you don't measure up. Even though there are lots of people, I realize that I am more alone than ever.

Let's talk about masks for a moment. There is a reason that we like to wear masks and the problem stems from our ancestral spiritual DNA. When God created Adam and Eve, there was no need for masks. They were "naked and unashamed". We know they chose to sin and when they made that choice something changed. "At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness." They went from being naked and unashamed to knowing they were naked. I wonder if all the feelings that you and I feel like guilt, shame, anxiety and stress all flooded their mind and their heart and they knew something was wrong. They began sewing leaves together to cover themselves.

There is research that shows when we are stressed or there's conflict, the thinking part of our brain shuts down. The adrenal gland kicks into gear and were flooded with adrenaline which makes us have a fight or flight response. I would suggest when it comes to sin and knowing our shortcomings, we put on the mask. It is no different than covering up with leaves. You have to know that we have a DNA that makes us want to hide. That's exactly what Adam and Eve did.

God comes walking through the garden and he asks, "Where are you?" Like he didn't know. He knew exactly where they were. They were hiding over in the bushes and look at how Adam responds, "I heard you walking in the garden, so I hid. I was afraid because I was naked." The curse of sin brings about fear, shame and guilt. When we feel that way, we hide and then we blame. When God asks if they had eaten from the tree, Adam says it was the woman you gave me. Eve blames the serpent. That is the cycle. When we feel negative emotions, we hide and we blame. That is why we need the mask.

Let me show you a picture. That is my hand. That happened last Sunday night, so this pictures shows about 3-4 days worth of healing. This is the culprit. Her name is Kitty Soft Paws. She is a very loving cat, but early that week, she had to be spayed. She had to wear the cone of shame so she wouldn't lick the incision. She hates the cone and is very skittish with it on. Sunday night I was holding her and Rebecca turned the vacuum on. The cat goes nuts and starts backing up my shoulder like she is going to vault backwards, so I tried to stop and she scratched me really bad. Lots of people have said, "What happened to your hand?" After telling him one guy the story of what happened, he said, "Loose the cat story. Tell them a robber broke into your house and he cut you with his knife, but you took him down."

That is the world we live in. Very few of people want to hear the real story and fewer are willing to tell the real story. It is easier and safer to put on the mask.

Here are some things I have learned about wearing the mask in the Room of Good Intentions.

Even though you wear the mask, you still hide

I would love to tell you that Adam and Eve felt shame because of their sin, but sewed together leaves to cover up and lived happily ever after. Even though they put the mask on, they still ended up in the bushes.

The mask becomes a way of life. I am going to mess up. There are times I don't make enough progress. There are times people hurt me. There are some sins I do over and over. Instead of being honest, I try to impress you. I don't think I can be fully honest with you. I am not willing to live an exposed life. I have to appear better than I am.

Jesus had an interaction with a man who told him that he had obeyed all the 10 commandments since he was young. He is often referred to as the rich, your ruler. I wonder if that is the mask he had fashioned for himself. When we first meet him, it says that he came running to Jesus and he kneels down and asks, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" There is an urgency when he runs to Jesus. There is desperation in his question. Even though he appeared to have it all together and "do" everything right, he knows something is missing from his life.

When you wear the mask, you can't love or be loved

The mask is the priority. The mask is what I put all my effort into. I am trying to prove to you that I am worthy of your love and respect. I don't want you to feel sorry for me. I can't let you see what is behind the mask, because you won't like me. The mask is what is loved, not you.

The mask is a barrier. It is a barrier between you and your friends. It is a barrier between you and your family. It is a barrier between you and God. When we wear a mask, there is a little voice that always whispers, "You are an imposter. You always have been. You always will be. You may fool

others, but I know who you are. You are an embarrassment. You have no credibility or respect. You spent it long ago.”

The mask doesn't just distort my relationship with people. It distorts my relationship with God. On this path to pleasing God and in the Room of Good Intentions, instead of pleasing God, all I seem to try to do is keep God pleased with me. Here is what the mask causes me to think that God is thinking "early on, when I first believed, God and I were so close. But overtime I kept failing. I would do something stupid. I would promise I wouldn't do it anymore then I would fail at the same thing again. Before long, it felt like God was on the other side of an ever growing pile of garbage that I had created. I imagine him further away each day. With his arms folded, he seems to be shaking his head, thinking, "I had so much hope for this kid, but he's let me down so many times."

The mask keeps us from loving and being loved.

When you wear the mask, you are living for likes and longing for love

One of the masks that is prevalent in 2016 is social media. The average Facebook user has 328 friends, but when asked about close friends, some say they have 2, 1 or some say no close friends.

I saw an interview with 6 young adults, age 18 to 25. They talked about their use of social media. Here were some of their comments:

“I can look at other posts and be envious, probably even judgmental.”

“I compare myself to others and it doesn't help with my self-image. It brings out my insecurities.”

“It doesn't help my dating relationship. I see all the good things other people post and I wonder why my relationship isn't better.”

The social media mask is a comparison trap. We try to present our best self – we find the filter, we have to have the right caption, and we need the most creative hashtag. We spend a lot of time getting the mask just right

and we post it and...not enough people like it or no one comments. It hurts and we ask "what is wrong with me?"

With any mask, I am comparing my behind the scenes with everyone else's highlight reel. It is a no win situation. We are comparing the front of their mask to what we know lives behind ours. If I am living for your likes, I die without it. When I live for likes, the mask I wear will remind me that who I am is not enough and what I have is inadequate.

There are some great things about social media, but maybe you need to limit your time. Maybe you need to check your motives. Maybe you need to delete an app. Maybe you need to take a social media break. You may lose some connectivity on social media, but I believe the connectivity you gain with a spouse, your kids, a friend and God will be worth it.

I hope you see that this room is not all that it is cracked up to be. It is not what we were meant for, so what do we do?

Could it be that simple? Just be honest...bring our brokenness...don't pretend to be something you are not. Are mercy, freedom and healing really waiting on the other side? Maybe you are saying, "I hate wearing the mask and I want to take it off." I applaud your desire, but it is hard.

We have worn a mask so long that we don't know who we are. We are so used to showing the false self that we don't know who the real self is anymore. We have gotten good at looking over our shoulders, saying one thing and meaning another, hiding, living in fear, being deceitful and living with shame behind a nervous smile. You were not meant to live that way.

Listen to what Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 3:15, "Today, when they read Moses' writings, their hearts are covered with that veil, and they do not understand." He uses the word veil, but he is talking about a covering or a mask. Paul says the mask doesn't just affect our face; it ends up covering our hearts. But look what he says, "But when someone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away." I love the way that the Message puts it. "Whenever

they turn to the Lord...God removes the veil and there they are—face-to-face! They suddenly recognize that God is a living, personal presence.” Maybe it is as simple as a willingness to come to Jesus with your stuff and he helps us take off the mask. Then, when we are face to face, verse 17 says, “For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.” That sounds a lot like the Room of Grace.

This is so hard for us to trust. Do you remember the prodigal son? He wore a mask trying to act like he didn’t care about his dad. His mask was defined by money and wild living. One day he lost it all and it says that he came to his senses. He thought about going home, but what would he say to his father. I’m sure on the journey home; he had so many conversations with his dad. “Dad I’m really sorry.” “You don’t even have to treat me like your son. After all I have done, just let me be like one of the servants.”

Look what it says in Luke 15:20. “So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him.” Remember, he had done a lot of hurtful things and physically, he probably smelled awful because he worked with pigs and ate what they ate. He probably tried to say some of those things that he had practiced, but the Father just put his fingers to his son’s lips, stopping him from talking, and said, “My son has come home; I want to celebrate you being back home.”

I want to introduce you to someone. This is Billy Blankenship. He is my son-in-law. He didn’t know this was part of the deal when he married Mackenzie. I love Billy. Some of you are probably thinking. No wonder you love, you have another guy around your house. Some of you know I have a wife, 3 daughters, female dog, female cat and a fish. I don’t know how you tell the sex of a fish, but it has to be female. So, I am glad to have another guy, but I am really glad it is this guy.

I can tell Billy I love him. I can tell him that he is now part of our family. Now, I am not his dad. He has a dad named Chuck and Chuck is a great dad, but I really want Billy to know and feel that he is part of our family. I

love when Billy comes over and goes in to our family room and grabs the remote. I love it when he turns the TV on and finds something he wants to watch. I want him to go to the refrigerator and get food or a drink if he wants something. My favorite time is when he will get on our couch and pull up the foot rest. He leans back and gets comfortable. There have been 2 or 3 times that he has fallen asleep.

That is the room of grace. God wants you to rest in knowing some of the verses that Doc mentioned last week. Romans 8:1, "There is no condemnation, (no matter what you have done), for those who are in Christ Jesus." Romans 8:38, 39 "Nothing (nothing behind the mask) can separate us from how much God loves us." 1 John 3:1 "See how very much our Father loves us, for he calls us his children, and that is what we are!"

We are going to sing one last song. It is called "Lord I need you." This song is more than a prayer. It is really a cry out to God from behind the mask. During this song, I believe the Spirit of God is going to challenge you to take off the mask. Maybe you need to come down here and let God help you take the mask off. Some of you need ask God' Spirit to give you a greater trust and confidence in who your Father is and what He says about you and what He wants for you. If you need to become a follower of Jesus or join this church, I'll be down here if you want to talk. Let's stand and sing.