

Coach House Church BEACONS

APPEARANCES

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Today I would like us to look at appearances. How do we appear to other people? is it a true image of ourselves or is it someone else that we project outwards? In a world where people put most of their lives on social media we can project an image of ourselves that is very far from the truth. Online, in our profiles, we can paint an image of ourselves that is always happy, always smiling ,always doing interesting things but inside we feel lonely, sad and hurting.

In a study published by Royal Society of Public Health called #StatusofMind it is argued that prologued use of social media has damaging effects on people's mental health, especially young people.

Let me read the following paragraph from the study:

"Research suggests that young people who are heavy users of social media - spending more than two hours per day on social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram - are more likely to report poor mental health, including psychological distress (symptoms of anxiety and depression). Seeing friends constantly on holiday or enjoying nights out can make young people feel like they are missing out while others enjoy life. These feelings can promote a 'compare and despair' attitude in young people. Individuals may view heavily photoshopped, edited or staged photographs and videos and compare them to their seemingly mundane lives. The findings of a small study, commissioned by Anxiety UK, supported this idea and found evidence of social media feeding anxiety and increasing feelings of inadequacy."

Heading towards middle age, I catch myself doing the same thing, which makes me think that it is not only young people who are at risk of "compare and despair" and as the study was saying, this feeling of inadequacy, 😞 I believe can pressurise someone into portraying themselves as something they are not. If you are not a social media user, when a trusted friend asks you "how are you ?" is your answer the truth or is it more an automated reply like : " I'm fine , how are you?" Your answer will determine the type of relationship you

cultivate with your friends. If you dare to be open, breakable and soft or strong and courageous, people around you will feel, know and love the real you. Throughout the bible we are repeatedly encouraged to tell the truth, to be honest and to love each other. We also see that most of the people that followed God's word, were often unwelcome and mistreated. One such person was the prophet Micaiah. Let's read from 1Kings chapter 22.

"For three years there was no war between Aram and Israel. But in the third year Jehoshaphat king of Judah went down to see the king of Israel. The king of Israel had said to his officials, "Don't you know that Ramoth Gilead belongs to us and yet we are doing nothing to retake it from the king of Aram?" So he asked Jehoshaphat, "Will you go with me to fight against Ramoth Gilead?" Jehoshaphat replied to the king of Israel, "I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses." But Jehoshaphat also said to the king of Israel, "First seek the counsel of the Lord." So the king of Israel brought together the prophets—about four hundred men—and asked them, "Shall I go to war against Ramoth Gilead, or shall I refrain?"

"Go," they answered, "for the Lord will give it into the king's hand." But Jehoshaphat asked, "Is there no longer a prophet of the Lord here whom we can inquire of?" The king of Israel answered Jehoshaphat, "There is still one prophet through whom we can inquire of the Lord, but I hate him because he never prophesies anything good about me, but always bad. He is Micaiah son of Imlah." "The king should not say such a thing," Jehoshaphat replied. So the king of Israel called one of his officials and said, "Bring Micaiah son of Imlah at once." Dressed in their royal robes, the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah were sitting on their thrones at the threshing floor by the entrance of the gate of Samaria, with all the prophets prophesying before them. Now Zedekiah son of Kenaanah had made iron horns and he declared, "This is what the Lord says: 'With these you will gore the Arameans until they are destroyed.' " All the other prophets were prophesying the same thing. "Attack Ramoth Gilead and be victorious," they said, "for the Lord will give it into the king's hand." The messenger who had gone to summon Micaiah said to him, "Look, the other prophets without exception are predicting success for the king. Let your word agree with theirs, and speak favorably." But Micaiah said, "As surely as the Lord lives, I can tell him only what the Lord tells me." When he arrived, the king asked him, "Micaiah, shall we go to war against Ramoth Gilead, or not?" "Attack and be victorious," he answered, "for the Lord will give it into the king's hand." The king said to him, "How many times must I make you swear to tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?" Then Micaiah answered, "I saw all Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd, and the Lord said, 'These people have no master. Let each one go home in peace.' " The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "Didn't I tell you that he never prophesies anything good about me, but only bad?"

If you carry on reading the chapter you will read that the king ordered Micaiah to be put in prison till he had returned safely. Ahab did not like what the prophet had to say, he did not like the truth, it was not what he planned and expected. However, just because he did not like it, it didn't make it less true. Micaiah was right. Ahab died in the battle.

Sometimes, people get offended by the truth. Sometimes, the truth is ugly. It's not what we plan or expect. when this happens, we just tell people what we think they want to hear, or show them what they want to see; just like Micaiah did initially. Nevertheless, the truth does not change; it stays the same even when it's ignored.

The apostle Paul, in the New Testament, knew about this problem and included the following advice in one of his letters:

"Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbour, for we are all members of one body."

Ephesians 4:25

Also, the book of Proverbs , one of the two books of wisdom in the bible also talks extensively about this subject. Let's look at some verses:

"There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a person who stirs up conflict in the community."

Proverbs 6:16-19 NIV

"How much better is to get wisdom than gold, to get insight rather than silver! A perverse person stirs up conflict, and a gossip separates close friends."

Proverbs 16:16, 28 NIV

As Christians we are encouraged to stand out of the crowd, not to follow it. It will be a lonely walk sometimes, and sometimes we will stick out like a sore thumb. It will go against our human nature that wants to fit in and be like everyone else.

In a world where we are told that being soft and vulnerable is a weakness, where we are encouraged to wear masks and pretend to be unbreakable, let's dare to wear our hearts on our sleeves and be disarmingly honest.

I will close with a few stanzas from a poem by Robert Daimiel that are very fitting with the times we are in and the theme of this beacon. The poem is called Be Careful.

We must be careful what we say;
You never know what people may
Consider wrong or incorrect
And then repeat with ill effect.

Corona virus permeates
the air we breathe and satiates
The minds of those who write the news
And warn us, all we have to lose.

We all must learn to wear a mask;
It seems it's not too great a task;
But then, I think, I can't recall
When no one wore a mask at all.

I think what we have always done
Most every place beneath the sun
Is wear our mask for all to see
So we can all pretend to be....

Whatever people want to see
When they consider you and me.
The problem is, for me, I see
A smidgen of hypocrisy.

A mask, which helps us to be safe,
Is worthy of the poorest waif.
But all the other masks we don
Are costume balls -- a social con.

And what can we conceivably
Expect from this chicanery?
If fakery is what we sow,
What will we reap -- do we not know?

What if we only wore a mask
To help accomplish this, our task,
To keep each other virus free;
We'd both be safe then, you and me.

But as for any other mask,
Let's lose them all, "But why, you ask;"
"Facades and pretexts, false pretense
Serve no good purpose, make no sense;"

"They all add up to nothing more
Then smoke and mirrors -- what a bore;
For every space that we create
Does nothing more than separate

Instead, reach out, embrace the good

We all can find where saints have stood.
Discard the mask; seek out a friend;
Your benefits will never end!



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