

The Nudity Test Luke 8:16-18; Ephesians 5:8-14
 Saint Marks UMC, Charleston WV 4th Sunday of Lent (March 30) 2014

Luke 8:16-18

¹⁶“No one after lighting a lamp covers it with a jar or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light. ¹⁷For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light. ¹⁸Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away.”

Ephesians 5:8-14

⁸for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹(for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), ¹⁰and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹²For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. ¹³But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, ¹⁴for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

“Awake, O sleeper,
 and arise from the dead,
 and Christ will shine on you.”

Three Sundays of Lent are behind us. We began in the wilderness, realized our need for TRUST, and discovered that Trust must needs lead to TRANSFORMATION. Three Sundays from now we will be celebrating Easter. 3 down, 3 to go.

Today is the MID-TERM TEST. And it's a NUDITY TEST.

Three things jump off the page in the Ephesians text:

- 1. Wake up!**
- 2. Nothing will remain secret; nothing can stay hidden**
- 3. Light will overcome darkness**

Three things, but really not three different things at all. Really three ways to say the same thing.

The question of sinfulness is a sticky wicket. Why do we humans do the strange things that we do? When God gives us the recipe, the formula, the prescription for abundant and eternal life, why is it that we choose to do things our way, a different way, a way that is not one of Trust, one that leads to Transformation?

When we answer Paul's call in Ephesians to **“WAKE UP!”** Paul is telling us to realize the falsity of the world outside of God's Way.

- It's not true! It's a lie!**
- None of that stuff we did while sleeping is going to be kept a secret.**
- The Trust will all come out in the wash.**

- **WAKE UP!**

Even though Paul's letter to the Church at Ephesus was written before the Gospels were written, Paul was on the same page with Jesus here, when we remember Jesus' words recorded by Luke, that we heard moments ago:

[N]othing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light.

But, notwithstanding this, each week during the time listed in the bulletin as "Pastoral Prayer," we have a time for making of confession. Not too often do I ever hear someone say, "Monty, that's such a waste of time. I have no sin to confess." I *have*, however, heard from some folks: "Monty, you don't leave us enough time in silence to confess all that I need to confess."

Let me back up just a minute: **What is this thing called SIN?**

I've heard lots of definitions in lots of discussion. The one definition that seems most adequate is: **SEPARATION FROM GOD**. That is **SIN (all caps)** and then there are lots of **sins (small letter "s")** that are manifestations of that living separate from God.

So, the **TEST** is going to be, **"Can we stand naked in front of God – fully exposed by the Light of Truth?"**

In Paul's letter to the Church of Philippi, he admonished them (and us) **"you must work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."** (Philippians 2:12)

"I thought" (you may be thinking) "that Salvation is free, given by Grace. How is it, then that we must work out our own salvation with fear and trembling?"

It **IS** free. **BUT** it takes a lot for us to accept that free gift.

Let me repeat that: **Salvation is free, but it takes a lot for us to accept that free gift.**

One of the great spiritual leaders of the 20th century, **Thomas Merton**, interpreted these words of Paul to the Philippians like this: Working out our own salvation means **TAKING OFF ALL OUR MASKS AND STANDING NAKED IN FRONT OF GOD.**

The **Nudity test** – again.

Q: What masks?

A: Oh, masks like:

- see how pretty I can make myself. Or
- please notice all the good things I am doing and don't look beneath my mask to see how bad I am on the inside.
- And there's **See how religious I am; and don't look beneath this mask to see how frail and uncertain my faith really is.**
- And we ought not forget the mask of **See my smile. See how happy I am. See how much I've got my life together. Please don't look underneath and see how insecure I really am.**
- And there's always an abundance of the **I am successful-just look at all the accessories I have** mask

But, remember:

[N]othing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light.

Ultimately, all of the masks will be peeled away and we will stand naked in front of God. Peeling away all the masks that we are so accustomed to wearing is usually done with much fear and trembling ... but it IS our salvation.

What masks are **YOU** wearing?

Sometimes we get so accustomed to wearing the masks, that we are not able to see them -- ***even look at ourselves in the mirror, naked.***

“Look at ourselves naked in the mirror?!! No thank you!”

Actually, that is a **SPIRITUAL EXERCISE** – to stand naked in front of a full length mirror and look at yourself.

- **Do you see the masks?**
- **What do you see?**
- **What does God see?**

Oh, if only we could stop the sermon right now and everyone would have the chance to do just that: stand in front of a full length mirror, naked and ask those questions:

- **Can I see my masks?**
- **What do I see?**
- **What does God see?**

But – we are not able to do that here, now. (And most of you take comfort in that fact.) However, I encourage you to do it at home. (seriously!) And while you are standing there, speak aloud the answer to that last question: **Q: What does God see? A: God sees what God created: a beloved child of God, precious and beautiful to behold.**

When we **GET** that -- *really* get that – then we are able to take off the masks, knowing in our hearts as well as in our heads, that we are acceptable, that we are worthy, that we don't need masks.

“But what about our sinfulness?”

Let me put it like this: **I've done some really dumb bonehead things in m life. And I've told my wife Jane about them. And, you know what? She has told me: It Is What It Is (shorthand “IIWII”) and it doesn't change her love for me nor her commitment to me.**

Even when my bonehead actions hurt her, she still just keeps on loving me.

And when I realize that my really stupid choices don't change her love for me, I am given a glimpse of the Kingdom of God. I am allowed insight into how God works.

And I pray that I can be more like my wife in how I model God's love toward others.

We **are** beloved children of God, precious and beautiful to behold. **Nothing will separate us from the love of God, in Christ Jesus.** And THAT is scripture: Romans 8:39

That, my sisters and brothers is **the nudity test**. Can you accept the **FACT** that **standing naked in front of God – nothing covered up – EVERYTHING WE HAVE EVER DONE UNCOVERED, EXPOSED, AND BROUGHT TO LIGHT.** And God says:

You are my beloved child, precious and beautiful to behold. Nothing can separate you from my love in Jesus.

That's the **test**. That's the **answer**.

Peel away those masks that we **ALL** wear -- trying to cover up what will be exposed anyway. Accept the reality of the Nudity Test and Answer.

You can't define your own worth. You can't make yourself acceptable. And **neither** do the opinions of others define your worth, your acceptability.

Just one last word that I feel a need to lift from today's scripture. I feel that need, because it's stated in the scripture as a **WARNING**.

Look in your bulletins at the Gospel lesson, in particular at verse 18:

Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away

The "**one who has**" is the one who has the relationship with God through Jesus Christ; is the one who regularly stands naked in front of the mirror and accepts the truth that they are worthy and beloved in God's sight; that nothing will separate them from the love of God.

The "**one who has not**" is the one who is too busy trying to figure out what mask shall I wear today; the one who is too preoccupied with the opinions of other people for the definition of their worth; the ones who do not spend time *in relationship* with God through Jesus Christ.

Those who have, will receive more. It's not about money as some people think.

The more time we spend in relationship with God through Jesus Christ, the deeper is that relationship.

The warning is that when the "valley of the shadow of death" comes upon us, whether or not we receive the comfort of the Good Shepherd's voice and his strong, tender arms wrapped around us, *really is* going to depend on how much time we spent in relationship with Jesus *before that time*.

It's not a judgment of God; it's simply the way life works.

Please – for the love of God! – take time every day to stand naked in front of God, and remember how much you are loved; how none of your masks really work. The truth will be exposed; will come to light.

And God says: You are my beloved child, precious and beautiful to behold. Nothing can separate you from my love in Jesus.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.