

AND THEY WERE AMAZED, AND THOSE WHO FOLLOWED WERE AFRAID.

A 14-year-old California boy is in trouble – and I mean “big” trouble – with the Victorville, CA, Police Department. It seems he was posing a police officer. And when I say posing, I don’t mean boasting to his friends at school at the lunch table that he was a police officer, I mean he had a deputy sheriff’s uniform, complete with holster and pistol. He had even gone so far as to outfit his great-grandparent’s white SUV with flashing red and blue emergency lights and was making traffic stops on unsuspecting drivers.

During our midweek sermons we’ve been hearing that God is calling us home, and we’ve been learning what God’s call means as we journey toward our true home in heaven. You can’t take everything with you when you travel, so some things get left behind. The title of today’s sermon is “Leaving Phony Facades Behind.” Facade. That’s a fancy French word. We may use to it in our everyday speech, but I think we all know what it means. A facade is a false appearance, a phony appearance. Like that 14-year-old boy pretending to be a deputy sheriff. A facade is the front we show the world, but it’s not necessarily who we really are.

The purpose of our worship this Sunday is TO STRIVE TO LEAVE PHONY FACADES BEHIND AND SHOW THE WORLD WHO WE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS TRULY ARE.

In our Gospel, Jesus and the disciples are traveling to Jerusalem and He began to tell them what was to happen to Him, “the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn

Him to death and deliver Him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock Him and spit on Him, and flog Him and kill Him” (vv. 33-34). We talked about this Wednesday night. He does something you and I are not really willing to do. He doesn’t hang out with those who like Him and with whom He agrees. Quite the contrary, he goes straight to the stronghold of His enemies – to Jerusalem. Remember what awaited Him in Jerusalem? After the raising of Lazarus, the chief priests and the Pharisees and the Council “made plans to put Him to death” (Jn 11:53). So, Jesus speaks plainly, openly, of what awaits Him in Jerusalem.

“And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid” (v. 32). They were more than likely thinking they would die with Jesus. That would make you afraid, wouldn’t it? You know what it’s like to be afraid. You can relate to the disciples; you understand how they feel. You’ve made that walk – that long, lonely walk – to the hospital room to see your loved one lying there on the bed and you are helpless to do anything about it; to the lawyer’s office to sign the divorce papers; to the principal’s office or the police station because your child is not living out their baptismal vows they made the day you brought them to the font; to the casket to see your beloved to say good-bye.

There’s a line from the Broadway play, “The King and I.” “Whenever I feel afraid, I hold my head erect and whistle a happy tune so no one will suspect I’m afraid.” That’s a facade. That’s a 14-year-old pretending to be a real deputy sheriff. But, is that you? Putting on your game face, whistling a happy tune, answering the question of how you are doing through clinched teeth, “Fine,” so that no one will know you are afraid?

The reason we are afraid is this valley of the shadow of death is because we have been corrupted by sin. Even worse, St. Paul says in

Ephesians, we “were dead in trespasses and sins” (2:1). That’s the big reason why you and I show false fronts to the world, and even to ourselves. We’re afraid in this valley of the shadow of death; we forget God holds us in the palm of His hand; we forget He will lift us up as on eagle’s wings; we forget Jesus is with us. So, we put on our facades.

Do you remember what Jesus told the disciples when they were afraid? He told them of His upcoming passion and death in Jerusalem, but then Jesus added one more thing, a promise that didn’t sink into the disciples’ heads, at least not at first. Later they got it. Jesus added, “After three days he will rise” (Mark 10:32–34). Jesus was buried so that life could arise.

Jesus went up to Jerusalem; He was delivered to the chief priests and scribes; they condemned Him to death and delivered Him to the Romans; they mocked Him and beat Him and crowned Him with thorns; and nailed Him to the cross to kill Him. And He willing did it all. He walked to Jerusalem; and there He walked up a hill called Calvary, carrying all those times you were afraid and did not fear, love, and trust in God above all things; all those times you forgot Jesus walked with you. And there, He died for you, for your sin, and because He did, you are forgiven. And He rose again from the dead the 3rd day, to bring life and immortality to light.

Remember that Bible verse I quoted a few minutes ago that says, “You were dead.” Notice that is past tense. The reason we can leave behind phony facades is because God has raised us and we are alive with Christ. “You were dead in...trespasses and sins,” Paul says, “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ” (Ephesians 2:1, 4–5). Jesus went to Jerusalem because He was destined

to die, but He was also destined to rise. Acts 2:24 says, “God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, for it was not possible for him to be held by it.” When you were baptized, you were buried with Christ, and raised to newness of life just as Christ was raised. Paul says it this way, “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his” (Romans 6:4–5).

We have been united with Jesus in His Easter resurrection, which means we have died to sin, and worry, and worldly fear. So, let’s leave phony facades behind. Why not show people our true face, people alive with Christ? That’s what we have been called to do in Christ. In today’s collect we prayed we would do just that, “Almighty God, by Your great goodness mercifully look upon Your people that we may be governed and preserved evermore in body and soul; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord . . . “ “Being governed and preserved evermore in body and soul” means living in our salvation, our life in Christ. It means being people bearing the fruits of the Spirit: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Ga 5). We pray for that. Can it come to pass? Yes, indeed. Philippians 2:13 promises, “It is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” That’s why we can leave phony facades behind, and are Christ to our neighbor and the world.