

## **Particularly Christlike**

9 August 2020

This message was written and recorded by the Reverend Jeff Martin, minister of Cupar Old Parish Church linked with Monimail Parish Church, for the congregations' Youtube channel, "Monimail and Cupar Old."

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-1QcTmbXukA>

### **Video Description**

We are called to give ourselves into ways and patterns of behaviour that enhance life, but sometimes we disdain the simplest acts of kindness. Second Kings 5: 1-19 and Philipians 2: 5-11 provide the foundation for this week's message. The photos are the Tweed by Ladykirk in the Borders.

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Face masks are now an expected part of our lives, and those who are truly fashionable have already built up a good selection of colours and patterns to match the rest of their wardrobe.

Officially, however, the purpose of a face mask has nothing to do with fashion and everything to do with reducing the risk of transmission of the virus.

Over these last months, the specific information that I've heard has focused on the mask as a tool that helps reduce the amount of virus-laden droplets that we breathe out. That is: a mask reduces the likelihood that we will infect others.

Some people are quick to point out that they don't have the virus, so they ought not be required to wear a mask. Of course, if they're asymptomatic, I guess they wouldn't know if they had the virus anyway.

Others—  
more commonly, it seems,  
in that very large, very powerful nation “over there—”  
others are convinced that the requirement  
to wear a mask in certain places  
is an abridgement of their personal freedom,  
and that no one can tell them what to wear.

Now that some studies seem to indicate  
that those who wear masks  
are less likely to get virus,  
or will have a less severe case,  
perhaps some of those naysayers  
will see some value to adopting this year’s “hot fashion trend.”

Or perhaps not.  
Sometimes human beings have a difficult time  
accepting that small actions can have a big impact.  
And we can be very resistant when someone asks—  
or demands—  
that we alter our actions or our words  
for the benefit of someone we do not know.

In the Second Book of Kings in the Old Testament,  
we hear the story of Naaman,  
a powerful commander of an army,  
who appeared before the prophet Elisha  
to be healed from his leprosy.

He walked away in a rage  
when the prophet told him  
to dip himself into the waters of the Jordan seven times,  
and he had to be persuaded by his servants  
to do as Elisha had said.  
“Wouldn’t you have followed his instructions  
if he had set a hard task before you?” they asked him.

A small act, and he would be healed.  
But he couldn’t imagine that a small thing,  
a bath in an insignificant river,  
could do him any good.  
Even for a benefit to himself,  
at first he was unwilling to try.

Contrast that with the hymn of praise to Jesus that the apostle Paul wrote in the letter to the Philippians: “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.”

Now Jesus’ death on the cross certainly was not a small act. It was a big thing, and it was a gift for everyone. But the crucifixion was the culmination of a lifetime of small acts.

The government and religious authorities perceived that Jesus was a threat to their power. Jesus achieved his own power and influence one act at a time, when he welcomed people, included the outcasts, healed each one who came to him, and offered words that both challenged and invited people to be their best selves as a living offering for others, especially those who were marginalised.

Over the years, I’ve heard countless people complain about having to be “PC.” Being “politically correct” is a phrase charged with meaning.

People often bring it up when they’ve stumbled over some word that used to be acceptable but is no longer, and the lament often concludes with a chorus of

“I wish people weren’t so sensitive!”

We are embarrassed to be called out,  
or perhaps we’re hurt by the force of the complaint:  
Sometimes when people raise their objection,  
they do not use words that are friendly,  
humble, patient, requesting, or subservient,  
because they are tired, frustrated, and impatient,  
and they have been feeling the injury for a very long time.

And so people complain about being “PC”  
and being forced to alter their own behaviours  
for the benefit of someone else,  
not recognising that small, consistent acts  
have the power to bless others  
and simultaneously change our own outlook.

If you happen to find yourself in that predicament,  
and you feel put upon to change your words or actions,  
I invite you to pause to consider  
whether that change would be “PC—”  
not “politically correct,”  
but PC— particularly Christlike.

Would it be PC, particularly Christlike,  
to use words that welcome rather than exclude,  
that lift up instead of demean?

Would it be PC, particularly Christlike,  
to examine our physical spaces  
and our habits and traditions  
from the viewpoint of someone who is not an insider,  
and to alter those things  
that do not provide the expansive hospitality and inclusion  
that we say we desire?

Would it be PC, particularly Christlike,  
to wear a mask  
so that those who are more vulnerable  
may come into public spaces  
with the reassurance  
that others care about their welfare?

And to bring another perspective:  
if I see someone **not** wearing a mask,  
would it be PC, particularly Christlike,  
to **not** rush over and lecture them on their thoughtlessness,  
but instead  
to remember that this person  
could easily have an underlying condition  
that prohibits them from wearing a mask,  
and to have a thought and prayer for their well-being?

Confronted with invitations, challenges, and mandates  
to change our behaviour,  
change our words,  
change our physical spaces,  
change our structures and institutions,  
change the ways that we look at history,  
and change the ways that we set our priorities for the future,  
we could resist.  
We could loudly vocalise our opposition  
to alterations that require us  
to leave behind comfortable habits and traditions.

Or we could comply with the change,  
but only with a continuing lament,  
so that everyone knows that we feel put upon,  
and our compliance is merely superficial,  
not heart-felt.

Or, as a final alternative,  
we could pause to reflect on the purpose of the change,  
to listen to those who are affected,  
and then,  
perhaps in small steps,  
we could learn to affirm the change  
as a gift, an offering,  
that we take on for our own selves,  
not simply because it is required,  
but because we affirm the intention for life  
that the change represents.

In this manner,  
we adopt “the mind of Christ,”  
as Paul had said.

Our affirmation then becomes,  
“I adopt this practice,  
not simply because it is required,  
but because I see that it brings life—  
to me, to a loved one, to a complete stranger.”

And that is PC,  
particularly Christlike.

I invite you to pray with me now:

Christ our Saviour,  
may your mind be in us,  
to lead, guide, and govern our thoughts,  
our words, our actions,  
our habits, and our behaviours.

Forgive us when we refuse to acknowledge  
the pain, exclusion, and diminishment  
that we have caused others to suffer.

Give us insight, humility, and trust,  
that we are able and free to examine our lives,  
and make changes that more fully reflect your purposes.

Let your wisdom rest upon those  
who are called to positions of leadership  
in these challenging times.

In places of business, in churches,  
in government, in education,  
in health care, in all sectors and services—  
may your gifts abound in wisdom, courage,  
humility, creativity,  
flexibility, and compassion,  
that all of your people  
may have life in abundance.

And by the power of your love working in our lives,  
may everything that we say or do  
indeed be considered “particularly Christlike.” Amen