

Thought for the Day 24th July - John Reed

Read Exodus 34:29-35

With the COVID-19 pandemic sadly taking off again in Victoria these past couple of weeks, it has now become compulsory for people in Melbourne to wear face masks in public, to protect themselves and others from the virus. It's a two-way street: if you don't have the virus, you don't want to accidentally breathe in what someone else has breathed or coughed or sneezed out; and if you do have the virus (perhaps without even knowing it), you don't want to cough, breathe, or sneeze on others.

In this passage, Moses finds he has to wear a mask to protect others – not from the coronavirus, but from the unbearable holiness of God that is still showing on his face even when he comes down from the mountain.

This reminds us that the pure, wonderful, fearful, powerful, holiness of God is something that we fallen human beings cannot comprehend or tolerate – just as he cannot tolerate our unholiness.

We are reminded of this again in several other places through the Bible. Isaiah 6 is one. Isaiah has this marvellous visionary encounter with God: "In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple ..." (v. 1). And as he is confronted with the holiness of God, Isaiah the great prophet says (v. 5): "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"

In the Gospels, we see this holy God come among us in the flesh. Jesus is the radiance of the glory of God (Hebrews 1:3). And those who saw Jesus for who he truly was had the same reaction as Isaiah. In Luke chapter 6, when Jesus meets Simon Peter and his fellow fishermen and told them to try putting their nets out on the other side of the boat and they caught a huge load of fish, Simon Peter says (v. 8): "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

Which makes the gospel so powerful, because what Jesus has done is make us holy and acceptable to God. Hebrews 13:12 tells us that Jesus "sanctified us" through his blood ("sanctify" means make holy). And in and through Jesus, the writer to the Hebrews tells us we can "with confidence approach the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). In Jesus, God neither hides his from us, nor asks us to cower and turn away. We can approach him with confidence.