

August 27, 2020

Trinity Musings #21: Rev Brian Goodings (sheltering@Trinity United Church sans face mask)

Hey remember the Barbaric-cultural-hotline? An idea introduced by our own local political-doc to report “awful stuff *THOSE* people were doing” which *WE* found offensive. Mining and shipping cancer-causing asbestos to people in poor countries is just good business, brother, but some really awful things just have to be reported! *WE* know what they are!

One of the practices that has caused a lot of hullabaloo is the wearing of a Niqab. This is what the scarf or fabric is called that covers some Muslim women’s lower faces. (The Burka covers a woman’s entire face and body.) It should be added that wearing these coverings is really more of a cultural practice than religious requirement. Some Muslim women wear them and some don’t. Full disclosure, I’m not a big fan but that may be because of my cultural and religious ignorance and besides, it’s not really my call. I don’t tell Amish women why they should or should not wear white and black bonnets either. This is a free country.

The Niqab is deemed to be really offensive to some people because...well I’ve heard a number of some very good and some not-so-good reasons. The bottom line usually against the practice is, nobody in Canada should have to wear anything over their face and it’s a bit strange and unsettling to see only the eyes of others.

Yeah it is but, have ya been out lately? If not, lemme tell you there’s been a bit of a shift in our culture and everyone is wearing face-garb now. Suddenly most, but certainly not all, of us have agreed that wearing a face covering is a very good idea. I know it’s for quite a different reason than wearing of the Niqab... but should the reason really matter? Has what we found previously objectionable in the practice changed just because the reason has?

Face coverings were objectionable, mainly because we couldn’t “read” the wearer’s face. Apparently, many believe we all have a right to see the faces of others, whether they want us to or not. Who knows, they could well be sticking their tongue out at us behind the covering or mouthing nasty words in our direction.

As a recent face-cover-wearer myself, I confess that this is what I've often been doing behind mine. On the rare occasion I have ventured into the grocery store I wear my mask and return home feeling great. The reason is that I've secretly cussed out and scowled at every idiot I've encountered during the adventure.

There's the heavily tattooed and muscled-dude with the yellow Hummer (look at me!) who parks in the handicapped spot. Or the inconsiderate person in the BMW or Audi who is too important to put the cart away and simply abandons it in the parking lot. Then there's the goofy-guy (usually middle aged or older) who wears the mask under his nose or below his chin. I don't know if it's a sign of protest or just ignorance. Or the directionally challenged shopper who simply can't or won't follow the arrows in the aisles. It's not that hard. And finally there's the kiwi/mango/melon/tomato/avocado squeezer that mauls a lot of fruit with their bare hands before finally picking one.

Unbeknownst to them, I've thoroughly cussed them all out under my mask, without endangering my health. It's actually cathartic.

I've also noticed that I'm able to get through stores in about half the time or less than it used to take me. If people do recognize me (and if I recognize them) we might only nod at each other. If we do try to muffle-talk through our masks, it's but a few sentences, usually about the Covid-crazy time in which we find ourselves.

We avoid all complex topics like how we would finally fix the Leafs or whether or not the Red-Rooster is going to start a civil or world war or whether or not I'm retired. (It is slightly unsettling that people can't tell the difference!)

I am actually enjoying some of the privacy wearing a mask provides (all of you pretend not to recognize me in the LCBO), but there is a creeping feeling of loneliness too.

There will be people who will continue to wear face coverings like the Naqib post-Covid time for their own reasons... but I hope many will return to lives sans masks when this is all said and done.

I miss seeing your faces and smiling with mine and as this time drags on I believe it may be permanently changing all of our social behaviours in very subtle but significant ways.

Maybe we should all start to wear masks with pleasant messages or our names printed on the front? A clever saying or recognition of someone behind the mask might bring a smile to our eyes and right now, smiling eyes, above a sea of masks would be a very good sight indeed.

It might even be worth having a government telephone line dedicated to receiving reports of culturally helpful practices too? Just a thought that might help bring us together...maybe Erin will pick it up?

Nice to Trinity-muse with you again in these mask wearing, hand-washing times. At least we don't have to lose sight of each other.