



Life Unmasked

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I know there's a lot of people watching, especially in the diplomatic corps. It is great to be with you all.

I would like to take a minute just to thank Christian Embassy for the work that you folks have done over the years. It's phenomenal, really. Christian Embassy has been around for a good number of years, reaching out to parliamentarians and the people in the ambassadorial corps - people of all faiths, I might add. I know there's a direct emphasis, quite rightly, in terms of our Christian faith.

So many times over the years, I can tell you, Darlene and others, that you've been there, different people involved in the organization have been there at special times for people in need, in the parliamentary community and in the ambassadorial community. And it's meant a lot that you accept all people, love all people and are there for guidance and for comfort. So great work that you do at the Christian Embassy. And all the best as you continue. I have to say I kind of miss being at an event of yours, because when you're there you can actually see all the ambassadors and see the parliamentarians and the others.

It's a cliché to say these are interesting times. Times really like no other that the world has seen. I mean any time in history, of course, is a new and unique time. But this, with the pandemic, the fact that we have the media capability - all of us around the world, all peoples around the world - have that capability to see exactly what's going on in every country. To get the hourly reports of what's happening.

Masks: in every group in history

There's a lot of anxiety still out there. There's progress being made, a lot of fear out there added to the normal fears that seem to confront us in our daily lives. And every time we turn on the television, turn on our social media, there it is: masks, masks everywhere, the whole world masked.

It's a time like we just have never seen before. I mean, in our culture, we know what it is to see masks in our culture. Even with my kids, with my grandkids, masks have been a part of our culture.

If you follow, as some of you I think would do with your kids or grandkids, the Marvel Comics routine, all the masked heroes and heroines - whether it's Cassandra Cain, or whether it's Batman or bat woman, or whoever it might be, Spider Man - people have masks. We've grown up with that in our culture.

We go back further than that, to the Dark Ages when I was younger, you had Darth Vader all masked up and you had Zorro. We go even further back, Shakespeare of course, many of his plays having masks and him reflecting that really all the world is a stage.

But the masking is not unique to Western culture by any means. And when you think about it, China in their culture and in their theater, going back to the Song dynasty, back to the 12th century - the Peking mask as they were called. Japan, going back for centuries or decades with the Noh masks. The Korean culture, back hundreds of years, the Sandae masking plays. African culture, look at how African masks even influenced over a century ago the art of the Western society, Picasso and the Cubist movement. Back to what we call North America or the Northwest First Nations group with their articulating masks.

I mean, just every culture knows what it is to have masks. Not just masks that cover our faces, but masks, in fact, cover our emotions. That make us realize that even when we're saying and doing things that are meaningful, people still feel the necessity to use a mask over the face.

I think we can all recall Maya Angelou and when she reflects on Paul Dunbar's famous iconic poem and poetry from over a century ago, *The Mask*. She talks about how,

*We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes...*

Masks hide things.

We are all, in every society, familiar with masks and the fact that we use them. Masks hide things. And that's not always bad, the fact that masks hide things. Sometimes it's good to hide things in terms of putting a mask of emotion on ourselves.

There's times we mask our emotions with our kids. At times, we'd like to do more than just hug them when they're driving us a little bit crazy, or at times when we're about to surprise them with a gift, we'll temporarily mask our emotions.

Masks can be good. Masks can also not be so good. Those of you who have ever gambled - I'll confess to a little bit of that way back in my misspent youth. You know the gambler at the table gets dealt the card that she was hoping for...gets that ace of spades, but the poker face is on and so things are masked.

You can look at negotiating tables. I can remember many times in international trade being around a negotiating table. You're talking about trying to get the best deals for your country. You don't want to let everybody see what you're thinking and give your position away when you're sitting there at that negotiating table. In a way you're wearing a mask. Sometimes we wear those masks when we have these international relations. Sometimes they serve a purpose and other times they don't.

Masks protect us.

Masks - we know very well - protect us. They protect us certainly in situations regarding our health. They protect us in sports. If you've played hockey - as a goalie especially - you wear that goalie mask. If you've been a catcher in baseball, the baseball mask is there, and for the batter. And the batter in the cricket game wears a mask. If you've ever taken up fencing - and I mean the sport, not the job - masks can be protective. Masks actually can be helpful at times.

Masks can impair us.

But masks can also impair us. They can limit our vision. They can restrict our breathing. I can think of times in my life where I've consciously masked myself in, closed myself in, closed off, put myself at the center and masked off others. Masked off maybe the needs of others or other possibilities that may be out there. So masks can actually impair us.

And I can think of a time and a place earlier in my life in younger years where I actually masked off the possibility that God could be there, that there could be a loving God. And I did that, because really I wanted to put myself at the center of the situation. Master of my own destiny, I guess you could call it. And in doing that, I actually masked myself off from the divine truth about a loving God.

“Hey if you're there, then show me.”

I can remember one point in my life where - this shows the arrogance of a person (myself in this situation) - the arrogance of a person who puts themselves at the center of the universe. I can remember I was on my motorcycle and I pulled over the side of the road. And I was at this cliff and it looked over a waterway far below and I remember I was contemplating my life. As I was thinking about what I was going to be doing next, I actually had the audacity to stare up at

heaven and said, "Hey, look God, just letting you know if you're there, give me a sign right now. Do something in the sky. And if you do show me a sign - move something around up there right now - I'll be your guy."

And I've thought many times later in life [of] the audacity I had. Here I was under an amazing sky, with more stars than can be named - an incredible universe - and all of the world around me in such an amazing display of God's creativeness and I got the nerve to say, "Hey, show yourself and you might be fortunate enough to have me on your team."

God had gone through an unmasking and revealed true love, true forgiveness, true caring, through Christ on earth and through Christ's resurrection.

And what I stared up at that night was a starry, starry night - a beautiful night - but no sense at all that if God was there, that I was going to be any part of that.

But [...] over the next couple of years, in a number of ways, sequentially, circumstances and also meeting people who really would make this statement: that they really believed that there was a loving God there. That God, in fact, had gone through an unmasking and revealed true love, true forgiveness, true caring, through Christ on earth and through Christ's resurrection.

When I took my mask off and stepped into the center of God's universe, that's when I began to be able to move myself out of the center of everything - the center which had driven my selfishness.

God had done, actually the unmasking and I was the one that was masking myself to that truth. And it was when I took my mask off and stepped into the center of God's universe, rather than my universe, that's when I began to be able to move myself out of the center of everything. The center which had driven my selfishness. That had made it hard for me to forgive people. That had made me vindictive. That made me always want my way and not care so much about other people's ways.

Those of you who are ambassadors, we owe you a debt of thanks. The world owes thanks to its ambassadors, because ambassadors are the ones who understand that it's peacemaking and reaching out and trying to understand others. Where we really begin to see our fears start to drop away. Where we really begin to see that there's a God that we can trust out there.

And since that time in my life when I made that decision to move myself out of the center, and put God in the center...You know I would love to say to you that since that time, I've been perfect. I've never said anything wrong. I've never done anything wrong. I've never hurt anybody. I've never done anything I regret. I'd love to be able to say that I've never said or

done anything wrong since then. I'd love to be able to say that every time I should have spoken up, I did speak up. Or every time I should have done something, I did do something. I would like to be able to say that.

God's record is perfect.

No one person has a perfect record in that regard. But God's record is perfect. God's record of forgiveness is perfect. And that's what began to be revealed to me as I unmasked myself and took myself out of the center of the universe. I began to be more forgiving. I began to be more understanding. Not perfectly by any means.

You can have a vigorous debate and disagree strongly...but still appreciate the fact they are a creation of God: they need to be respected, cared for and loved.

But as I've found, you can have a vigorous debate with somebody. You can disagree strongly with somebody, but still appreciate the fact they are a creation of God. They are one of God's people. And they can be and need to be respected, cared for and loved as another human being. That has helped me. It helps me deal with my fears and also helps me deal with others.

One of the things I think we've lost in our social contact today and through social media is this ability to disagree with somebody, or disagree with the narrative of your own group and do it in a way which still respects the person you're disagreeing with. I haven't always been perfect at that. People have observed that they think in politics that I tried not to come across as vindictive, that I could agree to disagree and still respect the person.

Daily [...] in Parliament, they have something called *Question Period*. And as Ministers of the Crown, or as Leader of the Opposition, you would [...] respond and sometimes it gets a little feisty. I would always be in a bit of dread if I got back to my office after the Question Period and my assistant said, "There's a call from your mother."

And my mother - may she rest in peace - she would call from time to time. And I would dread that call, after Question Period, it would usually go something like this. She would say, "Why were you rude to that nice man?"

I would say, "Mom, I wasn't being rude. By the way, that was not a nice man."

But you know, that wouldn't cut it.

I get to be forgiven, as long as in the same way I forgive others.

I find in life you constantly have to ask for God's help, for His love, wisdom, understanding. There's kind of a social contract, almost in a spiritual way, that's made - most of us would be familiar with, whether people of faith or not - with something called the *Lord's Prayer*. And in that prayer we say, "Forgive me," - you say this to God - "*Forgive me and forgive my trespasses, as I forgive others.*" (Matthew 6:14-15)

Wow, that's a tall order, because if we believe - as I do - that someday - talk about taking the mask off - there will actually be a face-to-face encounter with our Creator. No masks. No masks at all. I've been living under this deal. I struck this deal that I get to be forgiven, as long as in the same way I forgive others. People who may have hurt me or crossed me, I want to forgive them totally and that's what brings peace to my heart. That's what helps me with the fears of the future: that we have a God who loves and cares for us.

I don't know where COVID is going to go, but to be able to call on God and to have that peace that comes with knowing God, really makes the difference and helps me take that mask off.

"Hey if you're there, then show me."

So, I want to thank you for your time today. And the fact that you've been willing to listen. Some of you would share these beliefs. Some of you, I know, do not. And I just invite you to think on these things. And maybe if you haven't done this, as I did, many, many years ago, I looked up to heaven one day and said, "Hey if you're there, then show me."

If anybody asks that prayer, in my experience in talking with so many people through the years, whenever you put that prayer out there, watch what'll happen. You may be part of that group that knows what it is to take off the mask and meet the unmasked God.

Thanks for your time. Thanks for all you do to make the world a better place.

Question and Answer

In your time of representing Canada internationally, what times stand out in having been a time when taking the mask off and sharing openly and honestly actually advanced the cause or relationship, rather than hindering it?

Over the years in discussions with other leaders and even world leaders, there's things that sometimes people request [to] be kept in confidence, so I want to honour and respect those discussions. Here is something interesting. There's so many great people, of course, that are available to us as ministers to advise and to give us our briefings and things like that and that's certainly the case with International Trade and with Foreign Affairs, as it was called then. [...] Here's what I remember when they would say, "You're going to China."

And I've been able to meet the leaders of China - presidents and others - and have indepth private discussions with them, sometimes on my own, other times with former Prime Minister Stephen Harper. And we were always told in briefings, "One thing you want to avoid: don't humiliate Chinese leaders in public. They don't like that."

And my response was always, well of course, I wouldn't do that. And by the way, which leaders in the world do like to be humiliated? That doesn't sound strange to me, nobody likes that.

But I can tell you, what really helped to advance discussions, was really being open and taking the mask off. Sometimes it would be in the private discussions and sharing differences - let's say about human rights, sharing differences about democracy itself, sharing differences about faith.

I've been in settings in societies - not just Chinese, not just Communist-based governments, but other types of governments - which take a firm stand related to religion, or Christianity specifically. But I find that being open and sharing along those lines respectfully, actually would help to advance the cause. But also listening to them, giving time and respect, not having to agree with everything, but showing respect back. It is one of those things in life where you will oftentimes - not always - you will receive back in the way you gave out. Show people respect, be open and honest with them, listen to them and I find the masks have a tendency to come off.

How has the example of Jesus as a mediator affected your own negotiations? Especially with a difficult opponent?

One time in a country with leaders that I would say [...], their country did not even permit - at least publicly [...] - expressions of other beliefs, even Christian beliefs. And meeting with those

leaders and sharing with them again the truth - 'cause the question was specifically related to Jesus Himself. You recall when Jesus was asked the question. It was about government. And it was really about the division between church and state.

And he held up the coin in that famous exchange - for those who may not be aware of it - because the question was, do you give your allegiance to the government, or do you give your allegiance to God? And he held up a coin and showed both sides. One side showed there was the leader. The political leader. The head of state. And he gave that acknowledgement, saying [...] there is a place [...] for government. There is a place for leadership in politics.

And be willing to acknowledge that in this particular case, with these other leaders, and I was able to actually bring up the whole issue of religious freedom in a country in which they did not allow it. I did it by saying, "I recognize your concerns and recognize that you may feel that there were groups who would actually threaten your society itself."

And so recognizing what the concern is. Showing some respect for it - not acknowledging necessarily whether it's right or wrong. [...] I remember having the picture in my mind of Jesus saying, you know what, there is a place for government. A place where the government should be respected. But of course, there's a place for God. So, examples like that helped me to think through situations like that.

What made you unmask yourself before God? And ultimately, what convinced you that faith in Jesus is a credible alternative, that the Christian faith is true?

Well those are great questions. They form some of the central questions to life itself. I mean, when I was wrestling with these things in my own mind, after school and university years, there were a number of things that affected my thinking. There was just the reality that I had dismissed - or let's say - masked myself from the truth, for instance that even the Bible was true. I was willing to say, maybe I'm ignorant in some of these areas.

Because I remember actually talking with somebody who was a learned scholar and intellectual - Christian based. I said, "Listen, I want to respect you, but I don't even know how you can believe in a book that was written by some king."

I think - talk about a mask - I think he tried not to laugh at that point, I saw a little smile on his face. And he said, "What do you mean?"

I said, "Well you believe in this book that was written by this king named James."

And then he did sort of smile, benevolently and he said, “You know, there is a translation of the Scriptures that was authorized at one time by King James in England, but he didn't write it.”

And that for me began a study of actually where the Bible came from, where the Scriptures came from and the Dead Sea Scrolls and their credibility. I can remember being in a wonderful historical place in Paris and I believe it's called - I could get it wrong - *The Islamic Institute*, I believe. And in there, among their artifacts were some of the original translations of the New Testament, for instance, to see some of those going back that many years. All these types of things add up to the fact that you can put reliability. So I was sort of [...] saying my intellect had to be satisfied - pridefully I would say.

But then there was the personal side to it. I began to just meet more and more people who taught us this phrase that sounded a little silly to me, to be honest, at that time. But they talked about “knowing God,” “knowing Jesus Christ.” And I had to reflect that since the time of Christ, if you reflect on the number of people who say the quote, they “know him” or “have met him” - which is a pretty outlandish claim on its face unmasked. That's billions of people who either lied about it, or they're telling the truth.

So it wasn't just the Scriptures themselves. The historicity of Jesus, the fact that people talked about actually knowing Him on a day-to-day basis. These are all things that began to - in my own heart and mind - add up to the fact that there's a pretty good chance that all of this stuff was real.

In life and work in particular, we are asked to play different roles. Can you speak to the difference between roles we play and masks we wear?

That's a good question because I would often be asked, sometimes by people of other faiths - maybe Christians or Muslims, but people of faith - and they would say, “Being in politics, do you not compromise your faith? Because you can't agree with every single position that your government has ever put forward?”

And you know, I say, “No, I don't.”

But when you go into politics, it's kind of [...] a trade off that I made. I realized I wanted to be always sure I would have my say on an issue. I wanted to be able to listen to issues, but I wanted to be able to have my say. And then in politics, whether it's a caucus meeting or cabinet meeting, when the question is over, the discussion is over, you take a vote and what you decide, you go on it.

I can remember one time - let's get right down to basics and maybe this doesn't sound spiritual - but going back to taxes because Jesus talked about taxes. One of the governments I was involved in, proposed a tax increase. I was very much opposed to that. I thought it would be a disincentive and I had all my reasons. And I lost the vote on it. So was I compromising by not running from the room and saying, "There's no way I'm supporting that tax hike?"

And my answer was no. I had been open. I had been honest. I had been able to share my difference. And as agreeing to be part of that team, I went with the decision.

It could be called a mask in a way. Ambassadors, in a good way, have masks because they can't - [...] she isn't always able to say exactly what she feels about the decision of her government back home - [...] an ambassador in Ottawa. Is that compromising? No. Somewhere along the way, she made a decision that she felt she could represent. And I'm sure that in discussions with her government, she would very clearly state her differences and then go with what the agreement was.

I have never been asked to do something that would directly compromise my faith, or compromise a vital spiritual element of my faith. So in that context, I could continue and I could carry on.

And I believe that's one of the challenges we're having in society today, is we're so entrenched in our own groups. Add to that the anonymity that comes with social media - for instance, on Twitter [...] - but the fact that people are able to be anonymous allows for a type of discourse that is often anger-filled - I would say hate-filled at times - that can often be tremendously accusatory, insulting of people, derogatory...

We hear very tragic cases, sometimes young people who've even taken their own lives because it's so vicious out there in what we call the Twitterverse. And a lot of that comes from the fact that people are able to put on a mask and then do not allow others to express their views. So it's very important that - as I just said, not just in a cabinet setting or a caucus setting, but in our society - we have to allow people to express themselves, even if we do not agree at all. Especially if it's people that are going against our narrative. Once we start to take away that right and that ability, things become more entrenched, become more tribal, become more aggressive and we have to always be careful about that.

Are we becoming more or less civil in our current acceptance of all cultures and worldviews?

Well unfortunately - and this is my perspective - I think we're becoming less civil. [...] I can remember and I've seen the change has been fairly dramatic over a period of time. And if you

look at the time span of what we would call the constitutional rights of freedom of expression that evolved over the last two or three centuries...It's been a relatively short period of time that the broader body politic and the media that is its underpinning, is becoming so swiftly and angrily dismissive of other views.

I mean that's always been, of course, there's always people [who] get in heated arguments. It is much more pronounced over these last few years. I can remember when I first got into politics, [...] sitting around and talking with people of other faiths. I can remember a great discussion with a Muslim friend of mine. [...] I can recall, not that many years ago, with a Jewish rabbi, him saying, "You know, we disagree on who the Messiah is."

I said, "Yes, Rabbi, we do."

But no animosity between us on that point and yet, that's a central point of both of our faiths. And here we [disagreed] on who the Messiah is, but we [shook] hands when our discussion [was] over. [We] actually concluded the discussion quite nicely. He said, "Well, I believe" - he was an Orthodox Jew - "I believe Messiah is returning. And when Messiah returns, Messiah will tell us who was right and who was wrong."

And I said, "You know, I'm good with that."

But that's becoming more and more rare. The ability to disagree even on key and central tenants of our life perspectives is greatly and gravely diminished.

When we disagree with somebody, we can do it in a way which says, "Look, I completely respect that is your point of view. I don't agree with it. And here's why."

We should be able to say that without cancelling each other out, without going to war - either verbally or in other ways. And we are becoming less civil, whenever we allow less full and free expression, we become more tribal and less civil.

Do you feel that emotional intelligence can be a useful component of national and international diplomacy? If so, how and why?

That is such an important point and I say emphatically, yes! And if I can go back actually to the words of Jesus - because he talked about the possibility that we can know God - we can take off our mask and know God completely. But he talked about - he said with your mind and with your heart. So there's a combination there. That's true emotional intelligence. That's reasoning from the heart that's also based on fact and based on reality and based on the mind.

If you just win a debate based on harsh [facts] and have no empathy - I can have empathy for somebody's position without agreeing. But to show empathy to somebody is saying to that person - that's signalling that you think they are a person of worth. That you think they're a person of value. And I can and have disagreed with people on the largest and most extreme of questions, yet still work to get across that message that they are a person of value and of worth. And these things are worth discussing. So emotional intelligence and putting our senses on that is very important. People need to sense that.

Any final comments or remarks that you want to leave us with?

I thank each person for their time. And all I can do is encourage people to reflect, as I have however imperfectly, that we are imperfect creatures, we are imperfect beings. And when we're willing to take off our masks before a perfectly loving God and draw closer to God through that love, we actually as human beings will draw closer to each other. So I leave that thought for everybody's consideration. Thank you so much for your time.