

Daily Devotional, August 28, 2020 Do I Detect A Smile Behind That Mask?

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; Ephesians 4:1-4 (NIV)

There are a lot of memorable and humorous lines in the movie *Elf*—Buddy excitedly tells his new family about his favorite foods, “The four main food groups: candy, candy canes, candy corn and syrup.” When he does something wrong, he calls himself a “cotton-headed ninny muggins.” Buddy expresses such childlike love and inclusion when he asks, “Does somebody need a hug?”, and when he explains, “The best way to spread Christmas cheer is singing loud for all to hear.”

However, a truly cheer-filled line is, “I just like to smile. Smiling’s my favorite!” That line comes to my mind a lot these days as we all are being asked to coverup our smiles—and sometimes our frowns or looks of utter despair—with masks. I am truly impressed to see the creativity that many people have used to create friendly, inviting masks; masks that make statements or support their favorite teams and schools; masks that are funny and even masks made out of non-mask like items. Companies that traditionally sell clothes or sporting goods, even restaurants and shoe stores, have all figured out a way to create practical, fashionable masks—knowing we will want them and need them to keep us safe.

None of these masking measures have come without a certain degree of controversy. Like most of you, I have heard the protests and arguments both for and against the use and the strict mandates of mask wearing. I have wondered, when putting on my mask for the umpteenth time, will this really help? I’ve heard all the arguments and I mostly agree with them, but boy this is hot! And when will this end? But I wear one anyway, and most times I catch myself thinking—how can I still smile with my eyes? How can I still connect with people and be friendly when no one sees my smile and I cannot see theirs?

It’s then that I hear Buddy’s voice in my head and that funny, yet poignant line, “I just like to smile. Smiling’s my favorite.” The underlying theme for a lot of the movie *Elf* was Buddy trying to connect and relate to people. He wanted to fit in, with the other elves, with his dad and new family, and finally with his new friends, in a place where most people didn’t view the world with the same innocence and acceptance as he did. Even though he was sneered at and doubted, and while others criticized his joyful spirit—Buddy continued to spread joy and encouraged people to get along and care for each other.

In Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, he reminded them to “live a life of love” and to act with unity and love toward each other. Ephesians 4:2-3 says, “Be completely humble and gentle, be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” He was reminding these people who meant so much to him—to get along with each other, to care for each other. These are great reminders and encouragements for today. We are all, every one of us in this together! While it seems such drudgery to wear a mask continuously, if we all cooperate and bear with this just awhile longer, it will pass soon enough. We all need to remember in the words of Buddy the Elf, “There’s room for *everyone* on the Nice List!”

Prayer: God, help us work for the common good of all. For a spirit of openness to the needs and concerns of all who are affected by this horrible virus, we pray... God, for our church to faithfully spread hope among all people so greatly in need of it, we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.