



24th August 2025

11th Sunday after Pentecost



We're called to authentic living

Main Point:

Jesus calls us to drop our masks and live authentically before Him, bringing our real weaknesses and needs rather than hiding behind appearances or rules. True freedom comes not from looking upright, but from letting Christ straighten what is bent in us.

Intro |

Do you remember when costume parties were all the rage, or masquerade balls? I do! My sister's 18th birthday party, we had a masquerade ball in our living room. I had this great moulded mask with feathers and everything. Fancy dress parties are lots of fun ... at first, because it is exciting to hide. You can play a role, pretend to be someone else, and no one knows who you really are.

But after a while, it gets uncomfortable. The mask makes it hard to breathe. Your face gets hot. And deep down, you just want to take it off and be yourself again.

Friends, sometimes our lives of faith can be a bit like that. We put on masks—masks of strength, masks of holiness, masks of control. On the outside we look fine, but inside we're weary. Inside we're longing to drop the act and just be real with God and with others.

Today's Gospel story is about masks and authenticity. It's about a woman who could not hide her need, and a religious leader who wore the mask of piety. And in the end, only one of them walked away free.

Point 1: Jesus sees and frees the authentic heart

Luke tells us of a woman who had been bent over for eighteen years. Her condition was visible to everyone. She could not hide it, even if she wanted to. Every step, every glance from others reminded her of her burden. She had no choice but to live authentically—her weakness was written on her body. And Jesus sees her. He calls her forward. He lays His hands on her. And instantly, she is set free — straightened and restored. Her first act is to glorify God. Her life tells the truth: once bent, now upright; once burdened, now free. She is authentic in her need, and authentic in her praise.

This prompts me to ask: Where in our lives are we being invited to stop hiding our weaknesses, and instead bring it honestly to Jesus?

This woman reminds me of a crooked tree I often pass as I walk Toby. It leans sharply to one side. It's not symmetrical. It doesn't look like the picture-book trees. But you know what? It's beautiful—because it tells the truth about its life. The storms and winds have shaped it, and it stands as it is, authentic. That's the bent-over woman. She came as she was, crooked and weary. And Jesus met her there.

Point 2 | Hypocrisy Bends the Heart

But then we hear from the synagogue leader. Instead of rejoicing, he is indignant.

Notice that the synagogue leader doesn't address Jesus directly; instead, he turns to the crowd, hiding behind religious rules: *'There are six days for work. Come on those days to be healed, not on the Sabbath.'* Perhaps he sensed that others in the congregation were already wondering if they should bring their sick friends to be healed—and he wanted to shut that down before it spread. Outwardly, he looks upright. He has authority, knowledge, confidence. But inwardly, his heart is bent and crooked. He wears the mask of piety, but behind it is hardness, hypocrisy, control.

And Jesus exposes it. *"You hypocrites!"* (So, clearly there were other religious leaders present who were thinking the same way). Jesus challenges them. *"You'd untie your donkey for water on the Sabbath, yet you object to this daughter of Abraham being untied from her bondage?"* The contrast is sharp: the woman was bent in body but straight in heart; the leader was straight in body but bent in spirit. Which one was truly free?

Perhaps we could ask ourselves: Where might my heart be "bent inwards," more concerned with looking right than with living righteously before God?

Point 3 | God calls us to Authentic living

Our other readings underline this theme. Jeremiah, for instance, hears God's call and says, "I'm too young, I can't speak." He tries to hide behind excuses. But God says, "Don't be afraid. I have put my words in your mouth." (Jeremiah 1:9) Authentic living for Jeremiah meant stepping beyond excuses and simply letting God's word speak through him. Not false strength, not pretending, just dependence. What excuses do we use to hide from God's call in our lives?

As we consider Psalm 71, we see a lifetime of authentic trust: "In you, O Lord, I take refuge... you are my rock and fortress." (v1, 3) The psalmist doesn't claim strength. He openly declares weakness and dependence. His authenticity is in naming God as his source of life.

Do we project strength to others, or do we allow our dependence on God to be visible?

The writer of Hebrews leads us to contrast two mountains: Sinai, with fire and fear, and Zion, with joy and grace. At Sinai the people trembled. At Zion we are welcomed. Authentic worship, the writer says, is not about outward ritual but about reverence and gratitude.

Is our worship done from a heart filled with gratitude, or are we just going through the motions?

So, what is hypocrisy? It's the gap between what we show on the outside and what is true on the inside. It's the mask. It's the attempt to look upright while our hearts are bent.

Sometimes it looks like legalism—valuing rules over mercy.

Sometimes it looks like excuses—"I'm too weak, too old, too busy."

Sometimes it looks like false strength—projecting control while inwardly crumbling.
Sometimes it looks like hollow worship—going through the motions but without heart.

And Jesus calls it out. Not because He wants to shame us, but because He wants to free us. Authenticity, by contrast, is not about perfection. It's about truth. It's about bringing our wonkiness, our weakness, our reality into the presence of God and letting Him set us free.

It sounds like Jeremiah saying, "I'm only a boy"—and God saying, "I will be with you."

It looks like the psalmist saying, "You are my refuge."

It feels like the readers of Hebrews being invited into joyful, grateful worship.

And it looks like a woman, bent and weary, walking forward at Jesus' call, and standing upright in His mercy.

Application | Let's remove the masks and live authentically

Friends, this story asks us: *Which character am I most like?*

Am I like the bent-over woman, unable to hide my need, longing for healing, ready to glorify God?

Or am I like the synagogue leader—mask on, looking upright, but inwardly resisting mercy to those who are bent-over in life? Maybe, truthfully, we are a bit of both.

But here's the good news: Jesus sees us as we are. He calls us forward. He lays His hands on us. And He wants to untie us from whatever binds us.

Let's ask ourselves:

1. Where in my life might I be trying to cover over weakness instead of bringing it honestly to Jesus?
2. What habits, rules, or "the way things have always been done" might be keeping me from seeing God's work in a new way?
3. What excuses do I find myself using to avoid stepping fully into God's calling for my life?
4. How might my life look different if I allowed my dependence on God to be visible to others, rather than trying to appear strong?
5. In what ways am I tempted to go through the motions of faith? What would it look like to worship more authentically from the heart?

Friends, God's call is not to perfection but to authenticity. To drop the masks. To stop pretending. To let Him meet us in our bent-over places.

Like Jeremiah, we are called to speak even when we feel weak.

Like the psalmist, we are invited to trust openly in God's strength.

Like the readers of Hebrews, we are urged to worship with gratitude, not empty ritual.

And like the woman in Luke, we are invited to stand straight in God's mercy and forgiveness.

The kingdom of God is not about appearances. It is about freedom. It is about truth. It is about the love of Christ, who sees us, calls us, touches us, and says: *"Be set free."*

May we have the courage to live authentically in that freedom. Amen.

Reflection Questions:

1. The bent-over woman could not hide her need for healing, but we often can. Where in your life might you be trying to cover over weakness instead of bringing it honestly to Jesus?
2. The synagogue leader clung to rules instead of rejoicing in God's mercy. What habits, rules, or "the way things have always been done" might be keeping you from seeing God's work in a new way?
3. Jeremiah tried to excuse himself from God's call, but God gave him the words and courage he needed. What excuses do you find yourself using to avoid stepping fully into God's calling for you?
4. The psalmist declared his dependence on God openly. How might your life look different if you allowed your dependence on God to be more visible to others, rather than trying to appear strong?
5. Hebrews speaks of worship with "reverence and awe" instead of empty ritual. In what ways are you tempted to go through the motions of faith? What would it look like to worship and live more authentically from the heart?