

Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops

The Mask

by Lesley Dawson

I wear the mask of being ok, of being in control, of wanting to be the one who offers help, not the one needing help. I am usually unwilling to admit there is anything wrong, or that I need any help. When I am not ok, I just disappear and suffer in silence in a private corner

Do I admit to anyone that I need help? What about my closest friends and family? Do I admit to God that I need help? Perhaps He is the only one who knows that I do need help and exactly what help I need and when I need it.

The one time I admitted I needed help was when I had open heart surgery. My closest friend came down from Bradford to stay in Brighton for the week I was in hospital and was taken home by another friend who stayed with me for a couple of weeks at home. I remember the car journey home to Eastbourne when I held a cushion between me and the seatbelt to keep the pressure off my recently cut open breastbone.

I knew that it was healing very well otherwise I would not have been allowed home, but it still felt very tender. Even though the catgut stitches had been removed along with the tube that had drained my chest, there were still metal clips holding my sternum together. Every car that came within inches of us was a potential danger and that day I was the worst front seat passenger you would ever wish to have sitting beside you. The mask was lifted then, in fact almost thrown away, but then I did know this person very well, having faced Israeli soldiers on checkpoints together.

The mask was firmly back in place, along with a bright smile, the first church service I attended, “My word, you do look well. It is hard to believe that only three weeks ago you had open heart surgery.” I kept smiling as my energy began to disappear and was glad when I was whisked out of church the back way before anyone could talk to me.

One thing I have learnt during the recent lockdowns, is that we all need help to keep going each day, some days we don’t want to get up, don’t want to go out, certainly don’t want to help anyone else, just want to hide away.

Is that the point of being part of a community, like a church? Maybe this is the place where we can help each other. This is the place we need to help each other. But do we keep the mask on there too? The one place that the mask is useless is when I pray. In one of the Old Testament stories about King David, we are told “God looks on the heart”. Even if I try to wear my mask, He can see beneath it, so there is no point in wearing it.