

Drama with Reflection – ‘Act as if’  
Ephesians 4:25-5:2, John 6:41-51  
Lectionary: Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14), Year B  
*By Tod Gobledale*

*In Christ we put on a new way of being: Acting like a Christian may lead to becoming one.*

**Worship Leader:** Pray with me. God may the words of my mouth and the thoughts of all our hearts keep us on your way. Amen.

Let’s listen in on two new members of a movement called, ‘The Way.’ We’re in Ephesus...Remember, Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians. It has been just a few years since the death and resurrection of Jesus. Their movement is just taking off. Shhh, quiet now. Lean forward. Let’s listen.

**Theo:** Hallo Markus. God be with you.

**Markus:** And also with you, Theo.

**Theo:** What are you reading?

**Markus:** It’s the latest letter, epistle they call it, from our mentor Paul. Have you seen it?

**Theo:** Seen it? I have a copy right here! (*pull it out of a pocket*)

**Markus:** And, what do you think of it?

**Theo:** I think brother Paul is patronizing! What’s he written? ... “Put away falsehood, speak the truth. Give up stealing.” Humph! We already know not to lie and steal!

**Marcus:** Temper, Theo, temper. Paul also writes, “for we are members of one another.” He reminds us that from the lowest, least, in our community to the top, the greatest, we should treat one another with the same respect. Mutual respect.

**Theo:** I respect everyone in our fellowship.

**Marcus:** And, mutual respect is not just within our movement, it extends beyond our community. In Jerusalem most of Jesus’ followers are Jews. But here in Ephesus, on the edge of the deserts of Turkey..., with Iraq, Iran and India to the east and the flesh pots of Greece, Italy and Spain to the west. Here, all sorts of people are flocking to The Way of Jesus. We must treat all with mutual respect.

**Theo:** I said I do!

**Marcus:** Do you? What about that market vendor... What's his name? Cyril?

**Theo:** Cyril!? But Cyril's a Samaritan. And to tell you the truth, I think he's a little... you know... odd. Surely, you're not suggesting I treat him as I would you?

**Marcus:** It's not just me suggesting it, Theo. Paul says it is the true teaching of Jesus! It is part of his way, The Way! We must love others as God loves us.

**Theo:** All those people from all those different cultures? I don't know. Is it true what Paul writes, that "we are neither slave nor free, Jew nor Greek, Centurion or Samaritan, male or female in Christ Jesus?"

**Marcus:** It is true! You and I, and all of us must speak the truth to all people. No lies, even if someone is an enemy. And when we are paid a day's wages... we must do a day's work.

**Theo:** Hmm... Are you saying I cannot extend my lunch break when no one is watching?

**Marcus:** My friend, good character is doing the right thing especially when no one is watching! Taking extra time off from work is like...

**Theo:** Stealing...?

**Marcus:** Yes, like stealing.

**Theo:** I want to believe that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. But putting away, putting aside, all these things that Paul writes about: No gossip, no evil talk, no bitterness, no wrath, no anger— Marcus,... you know me. You know my temper.

**Marcus:** Yes, and ...no divisions among us, no slander, no malice.

**Theo:** It is impossible.

**Marcus:** Theo, as you put off those old ways, you must put on new ones: kindness, caring, and forgiving others as God in Christ forgives you.

**Theo:** How does one "put on" kindness? How is it to be done?

**Minister:** Ahem, gentlemen. I couldn't help but overhear your conversation. Let me offer a story by way of illustration.

**Marcus:** Okay, tell us your story.

**Theo:** Yeah, help us out.

**Minister:**

Once there was a handsome ruler. I say handsome, but their handsome features are masked by a permanent mean and nasty sneer on their face. Their demeanour frightens their subjects. The people respect the ruler, but they also fear him. Their fear leads to sullenness. And their sullenness leads to... hatred.

When the ruler rides by with their face all contorted, some subjects duck into side streets. Those not lucky enough to find a place to hide, bow their heads and avert their eyes, shaking in their shoes, willing the ruler to pass on by.

The ruler senses the fear and dislike from the people. The ruler mumbles and mutters mean things. Of course, no one dares speak, not even to say, 'Good day, your majesty'.

After a while, the ruler's anger overflows. The wisest wizard is called and the ruler cries, 'I am tired of how the people treat me. Use your magic to make them nicer. I command it!'

The wizard thinks long and hard and finally says to the ruler, 'You must do exactly what I tell you. No questions asked. You must follow my instructions to the letter. If you do not... then it is hopeless. Do you promise?'

The ruler responds, 'I promise. I will do anything necessary to get these rotten people to treat me the way I deserve.' With that, the face of the ruler settles into its ugliest grimace.

The wizard produces a box, opens it carefully and removes a...mask. A mask of the ruler's own face, precise in every detail... except one. Where the ruler's face always twists with scowling anger, this mask wears a... *smile*.

The wizard says, 'You must wear this mask for a year.'

The ruler recoils, 'A year? And such a silly smile? I do not grin like that, like, like, like... some idiot!'

'You promised,' says the wizard. 'Put it on.'

The next day, the ruler rides through town wearing the mask. Those who catch sight of the smiling mask react with startled surprise. They have never seen their ruler smile before.

After a few days, some brave a hesitant smile in return. Word spreads through the realm. 'Has our majesty's heart changed?' the people whisper, unbelieving. People begin to stay to watch the ruler ride by. They look. They smile, and some even dare to wave greetings.

Then one child speaks, ‘Good day, your majesty.’ This surprising friendly greeting renders the ruler speechless, which means... no muttering mean things in reply.

Each day, more and more people smile at the ruler. They wave greetings. They extend their ‘good days’ and blessings.

The ruler thinks, “This is how a ruler should be treated. Perhaps my subjects are becoming nicer people. They are not as rotten as they were a while ago.”

The ruler, in return, offers greetings and begins to ask, “How fare thee?”

And the people share how life is. The ruler listens to their stories of gladness and of woe. Even stops by the homes of peasants and chats over tea and a wedge of bread. Traveling through towns and villages, the ruler hears the need for improved roads and more doctors. As the year behind the mask continues, the ruler, still smiling, improves the conditions of the people. In return, the people’s respect and esteem for their ruler grows. They offer gifts of vegetables, fruits and flowers from their gardens.

Knowing the people have been deceived by the smiling mask he wears, the ruler begins to feel guilty and decides, “I must remove this mask.”

Standing before a large mirror, the ruler studies the mask. They see the handsome, smiling face reflected in the mirror and regrets having to remove it. The ruler does not look forward to seeing the twisted, ugly, scowling face that they remember from before. With lowered head, the ruler pulls the mask away with both hands. It tears in the process. With horror, the ruler realizes they will never be able to hide behind it again.

When finally the ruler musters the courage to look up, instead of the mean contorted face in the mirror, the ruler sees...a miracle...a smiling face, full of love and compassion. Tears of gratitude stream down their cheeks, for over the months they have come to love their people. Their face has changed to match the mask, and they have changed to match the smile. When next the ruler walks out among the people, their heart is light for they know they have become their true self, a loving and beloved ruler.

**Theo:** What’s that all mean, Marcus?

**Marcus:** It means, if we act like Christians, if we ‘put on’ [*hands up to face, like putting on a mask*] Christian virtues, we will become more Christ-like. Just like Paul has written, if we practice being kind, caring and loving towards others. If we are slow to anger and quick to forgive, by practicing these things in our daily lives, towards our friends and even the people we don’t like...

**Theo:** Like Cyril the Samaritan?

**Marcus:** Yes, like Cyril the Samaritan, then we become more like Jesus. We will be transformed. We can never be perfect, but when the time comes, Jesus will perfect us.

**Theo:** Maybe it's not so impossible after all.

**Minister:** Pray with me.  
Transforming God, shape our hearts, minds and spirits into your community of faith. Open our ears and hearts to Paul's practical ways to practice our faith, to take off old ways of relating to others and put on new ways of living which imitate you. Anything with you is possible. Thank you for showing us The Way.