

What Are We Trying to Hide? Kelly Lindsay

Veils are not very common today. Most often we still see the veils that are worn by brides. This tradition goes back to times when women were veiled for a number of reasons. In some superstitious cultures, before white gowns were popular, the bride was adorned with a red veil and long train. This was meant to look like flames to ward off evil spirits. In another culture, I read that the veil and long train made it harder for the bride to run from the wedding. I believe that had more to do with forced arranged marriages than with cold feet. In other traditions, the bridal veil symbolized purity. When the groom lifted the veil during the ceremony, it was a symbol of consummating the marriage. In the case of Jacob and Leah, I would say that the traditional garment definitely aided in the deception that was taking place. Leah was clothed in her wedding attire until after Jacob entered the tent; and it was the next morning when he realized the woman he had married was in fact Leah, the older sister, not Rachael, the one who was promised to him.

Occasionally, we still see veils worn at funerals. The black symbolizes mourning. Moses wore a veil when he returned from Sinai. Whatever the occasion, the primary purpose of the veil is to conceal – to hide; keep from sight; to keep something secret; to prevent something from being known or noticed.

It was 2015 and I was finishing the spring semester of my second year in seminary. I had a dorm room in Richmond during the week and was commuting back to Hope Mills on the weekends. On this particular week, I stayed behind a few hours after my polity class to finish my Old Testament paper. I emailed it in to the professor, sent a quick message to my dear friend Gail, “My paper is finished and submitted, how about you?” and I hit the road. Our plan was to get our papers finished that day, and the following weekend I was going to stay in Richmond so I could take two ordination exams on Friday afternoon and then the two of us would dedicate the remainder of the weekend studying together for the Old Testament final. I didn’t hear from Gail over the weekend, but I really didn’t think too much of it. I expected to have an email on my campus account waiting for me when I returned.

That following Monday, as I made my way back up I-95, I received a telephone call. It was the campus chaplain. She asked if I was back on campus, and I informed her that I was driving and had about an hour to go. “When you get here, will you please come see me?”

“OK,” I thought, “she’s never called me before. I wonder what she wants.” I was curious, but with only an hour left, I thought I could manage some patience. When I got to the chaplain’s office, another friend, was waiting there. That’s when the chaplain informed me that Gail had stayed up all night finishing her paper on Thursday and suffered a major stroke Friday morning. Because the seminary offices were closed for the weekend, the family couldn’t notify anyone until Monday morning. By the time I arrived in Richmond, Gail had already been taken off life support. Two members of the union staff and faculty drove my friend and me to the hospital so we could see Gail one last time. And I embarked on the most difficult two weeks in my seminary career. I had ordination exams coming; a final that I was not yet prepared to take; moment by moment I didn’t know if Gail was with us still or not.

I kept to my routine of attending our Wednesday chapel service. On this particular day, the Lake Chapel was packed. There was a meeting of the trustees going on so many more people were present than normal. I didn’t know them; and I was fighting an overwhelming sadness

knowing that Gail, who was one of the best friends I had in my entire life, had been taken off life support two days prior. I didn't know how much time she had, I didn't have the time to go see her again, and I was facing some major examinations without her comforting support.

When it came time for communion, I stood up from my seat and filed down the row with everyone else. Then I saw someone who not only felt sadness herself, but had a great deal of compassion for me knowing how close Gail and I were. We embraced; and then I lost it. I rounded the curve and had to walk down the center of the chapel to receive communion. The chairs had been reconfigured to seat more people on this day so there were rows of seats to my left – of people looking straight at me; and rows of seats to my right – of people looking straight at me. I took that long walk weeping uncontrollably. As if the pain I was feeling was not enough, I was an emotional wreck in front of my peers, the faculty and staff members, and the trustees. I wondered if any of them were there from my Presbytery and were they judging me. I was relieved to return to my seat, even though I had a total stranger on my right – a man who was one of the visiting trustees; and the wife of our president directly to my left – whom I had met but didn't know well, and directly across the room from me was the other half of the congregation facing my direction. But nonetheless, I felt a little more secure back in my seat.

One of the bonuses of having very long hair is that you have your own built in veil. I leaned forward with my elbows on my knees tilted my face toward the floor, and I was suddenly in my own little tent. “Of course the whole room knows I'm crying,” I thought, “but at least I don't have to see their faces looking at my red blotchy cheeks and swollen eyes.” Like Leah, my face was completely concealed from those around me.

We're told that Moses hid his face behind a veil. After speaking with God, Moses had experienced such a transformation that his face glowed. The text tells us that it frightened the people. The Israelites knew what was going on underneath the veil, but looking at it made them uncomfortable. In the same way, we may be uncomfortable when we see someone crying and there is nothing we can do to make it better.

Paul tells us that the hearts of Israel were hardened. For that reason, Moses continued to wear the veil. When Moses spoke to God, he experienced a transformation. God's glory was so strong that Moses's face was glowing. This was a temporary condition though. Over time, the glow was fading and his face was returning to normal. But Moses wore the veil so the people would not see this happen. Moses was deceiving the people into thinking he still glowed with the glory of God even though it had faded because they were such hard-hearted people that they needed the image to continue. Or at least Moses thought they needed the image to continue.

I think we are hardened as well, we want others to veil their sorrow or to excuse themselves to another room. Sometimes we want people to veil their joy. Do you know people who are so perky it's hard to be around them for long periods of time?

But Paul tells us to be bold and remove our veils. Don't we come into our places of worship to openly pray and praise and sing and offer our thanks and lift up our petitions to God? But upon leaving, do we also veil ourselves? Do we conceal our transformations from the world? We might not want to let others know how radically we are in love with our God. Or in the times when we don't feel so pious, we might want to hide our true feelings so others see us as blessed children instead of the insecure, frightened, wreck we may actually be that day. By doing so, we forge the protective shield around us where people may suspect we are vulnerable, but they cannot see our tears and know for sure. If that is the case, who do we think we are fooling?

I confessed to a fellow seminary student that I had lost my composure during the chapel service. “It was in front of the president, right next to his wife, in front of the entire campus, and especially in front of the board of trustees. Oh, what they all must think. I was so embarrassed.” Then my friend said, “Kelly, if you can’t do it there, in that place, and with those people, where can you do it?”

What was I trying to hide? My sorrow? My pain? My humanity? The fact is: I came to UPSEM and was transformed by my relationship with a strong, loving, Christian woman who was an incredible friend to me.

We too are transformed through our relationship with the risen Christ. The burden of sin is lifted from us. Our broken relationship with God has been restored. We proclaim and we sing... It is good to be in the house of the Lord! This is the day the Lord has made. I will rejoice and be glad in it! My hope is in you Lord! Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I’m found; was blind but now I see. Those words, and so many more like them, should have us glowing. Glowing like a bride walking down that aisle toward her groom. Glowing like the young woman anxiously waiting to deliver her first baby. Glowing like Moses who stood in the presence of God.

Veils are not everyday articles of clothing. There are times we want to wear them to fashion that shield that safeguards us or somehow preserves another. But we must be careful that we do not seek to deceive. Through the veil, we must see the bride’s smile, or the widow’s tears, otherwise how do we know who is under the veil? How do we truly know what is going on in that person’s heart? When we put on veils outside the realm of walking down a wedding aisle or sitting quietly in a funeral service, we don’t give people the benefit of knowing the context of our situation. Or so we think. Despite my best efforts to conceal myself in what I thought would serve as an invisibility cloak, I believe that people saw clearly through my veil. Instead of the weeping woman I tried to hide, I believe the people around me saw a woman in a lot of pain. I was trying so hard to hide my weakness, but the fact is, I simply could not hide my love for my dear friend. If the Israelites saw the face of Moses fade back to its original hue, would they have shown him less respect? Or might they have found him more easily approachable as a man? Would they have understood that the glow was a manifestation of God’s glory, not of Moses’s righteousness? Would it be ok for Moses to remove his veil? Was the intent of Moses to inspire the people to stay the course; or did it serve as a deception to intimidate them. Who does Moses think he is fooling? Certainly not Paul. Paul says “Be bold!” Unlike Moses who wanted to hide the fading effects of God’s glory, Paul is interested in truth.

I would encourage us all to consider the veils we wear. We are transformed in many ways. Some of them are painful for us. Some of them are so exciting that if we only stopped to consider how magnificent our God is, we would know that we can’t possibly hide it. The real question is why do we try? God’s presence reaches far beyond the walls of our sanctuaries and chapels. Moses had to journey up a mountain to find God, but we know that God is with us wherever we are. We are transformed by the amazing grace that is bestowed upon us.

Our humanness dictates that we will have times of sorrow; pain; overwhelming joy; paralyzing fear; anger; doubt. Being transformed does not mean that we try to live up to some level of perfection and hide behind our veils so others can’t see the truth. Transformation is to embrace new life that comes from the knowledge that we are saved by grace. Amid all our flaws, imperfections, insecurities, vulnerabilities, our failing to live up to the expectations of others or those we place on ourselves, stands a God who embraces that which God created. With whatever we are trying to hide, we’re not fooling God. And think about the fact that we are

made to live in community and relation with other people. We spend far too much time and effort trying to hide our true selves and our feelings veiled in the impression of appearances. We attempt to conceal - to hide; keep from sight; to keep something secret; to prevent something from being known or noticed. Friends, if we can't do it here, in this place, with these people, then where can we do it?