

A Few Thoughts for the Hunkered-Down

Thursday, May 28, 2020

Blood Donor Guilt, Expectant Mothers, and the Rest of Us

Early in the morning he [Job] would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them [his sons], thinking, "Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." This was Job's regular custom. —Job 1:5

All my adult life I have been a regular blood donor. Every two or three months I roll up my sleeve and drain a pint, and usually do so with a certain sense of guilt and foreboding. Each time I donate I fall into a brief fit of hypochondria. With every sneeze or twinge I wonder, "Might I have some bug that I am passing on to a trusting soul?" The blood bank asks that a donor call in over the following week if they should show symptoms of illness soon after donating, and after so many gallons I have never had an illness to report. After my most recent donation I was extra anxious and breathed a little easier after two healthy weeks had passed and I knew my donation was virus-free.

Now it is not only blood donors who are feeling the guilt. Despite all the proper precautions there is always the wondering and worrying. "Might I have the virus, and might I be passing it along?" With the world starting to slowly open up, and human interactions becoming more common and numerous there is the fear—"Might the bug be on the move and could I be a part of that transfer?" Until the last germ is gone, and that may be a long time, there will be the possibility. I am convinced that most of us feel a greater guilt over possibly passing on the bug than we do fear over getting sick ourselves. We need to address this guilt.

This all calls to mind the expectant and young mothers of our day. In recent decades the ob/gyn and pediatric communities have been informing mothers of so many possible ailments and the endless list of precautions that they should be taking. One of the negative results of this has been a lot of nervous mothers who feel deep guilt for every ailment or possible problem that their child encounters. Solomon was correct. *With much wisdom there is great vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.* (Ecclesiastes 1:18)

Before the days of germ awareness there was a great man of God who was hypersensitive to another unseen destroyer -- sin. Job worried that his sons might offend God during one of his many great feasts, so he made it a habit to offer sacrifice for each of them just in case they may have sinned. One would have expected God to reward Job's family with an easier life, but despite Job's great precautions, trouble came their way. With this disaster came "friends" who blamed Job for sinning and

causing it all! Job refused to confess a sin that he had not committed, so he engaged in lengthy argument with these men, and in the end, Job was vindicated by God! (42:7) Job refused to be drawn into false guilt, though he had many other emotions with which to wrestle!

Our society is now slowly opening up, and it is a little scary to go out, not so much for fear of catching the virus, but for *the fear of the guilt* of inadvertently passing it on! While I do not mean to claim that the real and central message of the Book of Job is about COVID, I do find a lesson there for our day. Job did all he reasonably could, and more, to protect himself and his family, and then he marched on through life refusing to be shackled by false guilt. That sounds like a plan!

We are entering a time of seemingly contradictory aims. We need to slow the spread of a dangerous virus and we need to restart an economy and let our society's people support themselves, and there is an irreducible tension between these two aims. In all of this may God give us the grace to hold guilt feelings in check. And having said this there are those who might make accusations of one being careless and anti-precaution. This must never be our intention! With all reasonable and genuine precaution, and then with the peace of Christ ruling in our hearts, let us press on into this new leg of the journey.

Blessings

Pastor Jim

A Prayer for Guilt:

*O God, we confess that we often look back.
We look back on mistakes we have made,
Work left undone,
People we have hurt,
Excuses we have made,
We see these as things for which we feel guilty.
We overwhelm ourselves with regret.
Free us, O God, from self-condemnation that immobilizes us.
Allow us to remember that you call us to look back.
To remember those times of joy.
To remember those people who were kind and compassionate.
To remember that we did the best we were able.
To remember that you journey with us each day of our life.
May we continue to grow in grace and truth,
in the name of Christ.*

—Rosemary C. Mitchell