

A Few Thoughts for the Hunkered Down

Thursday, January 7, 2021

Better Than Shaming

“Come now, let us reason together,” says the Lord. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are as red as crimson, they shall be like wool.” - Isaiah 1:18

While driving home I recently heard of a report on National Public Radio which grabbed my attention: “In this next hour—‘Is Shaming Counter-Productive in Promoting Virus Protection Protocols?’” I was stunned, and did not know whether to laugh or to cry over this apparently recent revelation to a certain reporter. I reached home before this report came on the air, but the title alone was enough to set my mind and spirit in gear!

Nearly a year ago when this virus came to our shores the medical and political leadership of our nation, along with the media, set a policy on responding to the COVID virus, and since that time the simple message of masks-distancing-hand-washing has been doled out endlessly with a dose of shaming thrown in. By and large the policy made sense, and I do not mean to say that every advertisement or instruction offered to the American people was intended to shame, but the element of shame has been present in the national appeal. This should not be a complete surprise as physicians have long been known as notorious scolds, and I suppose the politicizing of the mask during the presidential campaign did not help matters much.

Might this be counterproductive? Of course, it has been counterproductive! Shaming children does real damage to young spirits, and shaming the general population is not much healthier. While I will not defend those who flaunt all rules about masks and distancing, I do believe that this is a natural and predictable reaction of one who is being shamed. The national appeal has too often been heavy handed and laced with shame, and this element in the campaign has not been helpful.

As I pondered the matter, I considered just how God makes His appeal for cooperation to a wayward people. Does God engage in shaming? Plenty of verses could be taken from the Scriptures, particularly the prophets, which would seem to be forcefully shaming Israel’s bad behaviors. It could be said that God is God and can shame as He sees fit, especially in response to the human race’s genuinely shameful behaviors, but there is much more to the picture than this. The Bible is a book of countless *dialogues* with God. God *explains* His will and His behaviors, and *hears* Israel as they voice their thoughts and convictions to God. Isaiah began his prophecies to a disobedient nation, not with shaming, but with a wondrously gracious appeal from God: *Come now, let us*

reason together. God speaks with a deep *concern* for people, and demonstrated that real concern with the sending of His Son. God not only called us to obedience, but came and lived among us as a completely obedient servant!

Let us pray for our nation's leaders, political and medical, and for all in places of power that they could learn a deeper, kinder and more effective way to communicate and lead. In these days I hear many appeal to their alleged standing upon science. May they also remember that true science is a process of ongoing discussion, debate, testing and retesting. I would love to read and hear more open debate and explanation of the virus. How effective are masks, and what are studies showing? How exactly is the virus being spread in these days, and what evidence do we have to support these claims? Pennsylvania restaurants have been shut down, but the governor of New Jersey had kept that state's eateries open, citing the lack of any evidence to show that restaurants are any worse than other public gatherings such as retail stores. Why aren't we hearing more of the ongoing research and present discussion among the scientific community?

Let us pray that we all become more reasonable and reasoning people in these days. May we all be quick to listen, careful to explain our reasoning, and slow to harangue and shame. Let us strive to be more reasonable, just as our God is reasonable.

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

O God, our Leader and our Master and our Friend, forgive our imperfections and our little motives, take us and make us one with thy great purpose, use us and do not reject us, make us all servants of thy kingdom, weave our lives into thy struggle to conquer and to bring peace and union to the world.

We are small and feeble creatures, we are feeble in speech, feebler still in action, nevertheless let but thy light shine upon us, and there is not one of us who cannot be lit by thy fire and who cannot lose himself in thy salvation. Take us into thy purposes, O God, let thy kingdom come into our hearts and into this world. – H.G. Wells, 1866-1946