

## A Few Thoughts for the Hunkered Down

Tuesday, February 9, 2021

# The Dangers of a Safer World

*Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? .... But seek first the kingdom and his righteousness.... Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.* — Matthew 6:27, 33, 34

*Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there, doing business and making money." Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wishes, we will live and do this or that." As it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.* —James 4:13-16

As I recently perused the *Lititz Record*, I took a brief glimpse at the historical page and was captivated by a small headline from seventy or so years ago which reported “The First Sledding Accident of the Season.” My first response was to cringe at the thought of the kind of accident which usually involves children and can be very serious. It also set me off on a small sentimental journey through the memories of my young sledding career. What has stayed with me has been the dramatic change in societal values over my lifetime which the headline reflected. Not that long ago an accident, even one involving a child, was seen as *a natural and unavoidable part of life*. In that day the common attitude was that the winter season was young, and more such accidents would inevitably occur, for this is simply the way life is.

How the world has changed! Now we live in a world which places health and safety as the highest priority. Accidents are now viewed as *an unthinkable and preventable part of life*. (The article also reminded me how kids don’t sled as much as they used to, and that change has a lot to do with this change in attitude.) We live in a very different world. On a semi-regular basis, I see whimsically-phrased reflections on our dangerous childhoods which included riding in the open bed of pickup trucks, drinking from garden hoses, running the neighborhood unsupervised, living in houses coated with leaded paint and full of cigarette smoke, and inhaling all kinds of leaded exhaust and asbestos from the old vehicles which drove by. The list goes on, and there is no doubt that our world has become a much safer place. Such reflections are amusing, but they also raise a serious question. We have become much safer, but at what cost?

One of the reasons that we become so sentimental about former times is that we then lived in a blissful ignorance. Worrying has always come naturally to us, and now our ever-increasing awareness of the dangers which lurk all around us has made us into *expert* worriers! We have also felt compelled to devote much more time and energy toward engineering and controlling our lives to eliminate all potential hazards. We also discover that life's hazards are not so easily controlled! Occasionally our passion for health and safety can prove counterproductive. I think of the increase of allergies among children over the recent decades, much of which is now attributed to living in a hyper-clean, germ-free environment. In protecting our children from one set of dangers we create another. What shall we do?

Is our safer world worth it? Worry is no minor affliction and the damage done to our health by a steady diet of anxiety is not to be underestimated. We have also become controllers, with a little too much energy directed toward building that perfect world, as well as convincing ourselves that we can get it all under control. And where is God in all of this? While I do not mean to pit faith in God against seeking to live safely, I do believe that life is inherently dangerous (*In this world you will have troubles*, - John 16:33) and that having done our best we must trust in God's care. The Amish are quick to look at a tragedy and remark that "I guess it was the Lord's will," and this is said not as cliché, but with real belief in God's plan and providence. While I cannot accept this line of thinking when it involves an easily avoidable accident, I also know that our Amish friends are onto something. At the end of the day, we simply need to trust in God and rest in that gracious care. While we may criticize the Plain People for their seventy-year-old attitudes toward safety, we have forgotten the basic discipline of trusting in God.

Let me be clear that I am very pleased to be living in this safer world. We are blessed. But such a focus upon safety comes at a cost and poses real dangers. Jesus warns against worry, and James reminds us that our lives cannot be as planned and controlled as we like to think that they can. Somewhere between the Amish and our modern safety focused world lies the path of wisdom. May God give us the wisdom and faith to seek a healthier environment, while keeping us aware of the real dangers of a safer world.

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

*May God Almighty direct our days in his peace, and grant us the gifts of his blessing; may he deliver us in all our troubles, and establish our minds in the tranquility of his peace; may he so guide us through things temporal that we finally lose not the things eternal.* —Gregorian Sacramentary, 6th century