

A Few Thoughts for the Hunkered Down

Tuesday, February 16, 2021

Overcoming the Inoculation

I hope in the Lord to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. —Philippians 2:19-20

The great vaccine campaign has set me, and I am sure many others, to thinking about this little medical wonder. We are all familiar with the workings of a vaccine. A small dose of a particular germ which is like the illness to be prevented is injected into a person. This amount of germ is small enough for a recipient's body to fight and to build an immunity, making that person much more resistant to the feared illness. Not only do vaccines make us more resistant to certain illnesses, but they break the chain of transmission which keeps an epidemic going. Were it not for vaccinations, there would be fewer of us around, and many would be living with the tragic after-effects of these now preventable diseases. Let us all count ourselves as grateful recipients of these lifesaving injections, and let us pray that the COVID vaccine will soon reach the whole population.

As I reflected on this present campaign I was reminded of another kind of vaccine—a spiritual inoculation—which has caused great damage in our nation. Years ago, I was told that *most people have been exposed to just enough bad religion to inoculate them against the real thing*, and from the moment I heard this whimsically expressed observation, I knew that it was true. Sadly, many people have memories of a church involvement, usually from their younger years, which have soured them on faith. Perhaps it was sitting through a long service as a child while understanding little of it. Maybe it was a Sunday school class which did not connect with a child's imagination and spirit, or a religious zealot whose appeals sounded too much like harangues. The stories are many but the conclusions are usually the same: *Been there, done that.* "Faith might be fine for you," is the common reply, "but I have already tried it and have no interest."

Vaccines are effective, and it can be a struggle to present the Good News to one so inoculated. The best response is twofold. First, we need to suggest that one's experience of faith may not have been the best. No, it might not have been too interesting or engaging for a four-year-old to sit through a lengthy service, but that service will sound a lot better now that they are grown up. Encourage folks to seek and find the real thing. I have shared with some the sad and traumatic story of my childhood and my experience of rice. In my house rice meant "Minute Rice." Wow, that was nasty stuff. It was only later in life that I realized that the real rice was actually quite good.

(Sorry to burden you with such a tragic story. And did I mention that my folks only drank instant coffee?) We need to be encouraging the world to seek the real thing and not to be sidetracked by a bad experience.

This brings us to the second, and perhaps more frightening part of reaching out to the inoculated. We must have and present a genuine faith. Most Church members do not see their walk with God as anything to be held up as an example and have real doubts that their witness could positively influence another. We tend to be hard on ourselves, although we could all stand some improvement. Let us remember that genuine faith does not necessarily mean that we know our Bibles thoroughly, or that we pray as much as we should. These things are good goals. Genuine faith begins by simply believing that Jesus is our Lord and Savior, that He hears our prayers and that we can draw near to Him in worship. To present simply this is to present a genuine faith, and that can be contagious. Another expression of genuine faith is made in caring. Care about those you are trying to reach, and if you truly care about these friends and loved ones, your caring will become evident. In the Philippian letter Paul praised young Timothy, not for his eloquence or wisdom, but for his caring heart. Let us love people into the Kingdom.

Inoculated people can be hard to reach, and it may take many exposures before they catch the bug of faith, but these spiritual vaccines can be overcome. Like it or not, we are dealing with a widely vaccinated world, and an extra dose of the real thing may be required.

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

God our Father, you sent your Son to us: grant that filled with your Spirit we may be renewed in faith, and inspired in hope and love, to spread the gospel of your kingdom to all humankind; through Christ our Lord.

–Anglican Province of Central Africa