

Words for an Emerging Church

Wednesday, April 14, 2021

A Lesson from My Grandson

I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.

—John 17:15-18

I was amused to hear of a recent comedy monologue presented by Tim Allen which delved into the world of germs, and our return to that world. In his stand-up routine he mused over a year of being trained in the practice of quarantine and protection, and how strange it will feel when we are again in full circulation. How unsettling it will seem to be shoulder to shoulder at theaters and stadiums, breathing the same air as those around us, and how unnerving it shall be to experience those around us even sneezing and coughing! The year of quarantine and caution has changed our way of thinking, and Mr. Allen has wisely identified a source of anxiety for today and the days ahead. Apparently my one-year-old grandson is a Tim Allen fan, for he too has been showing me a similar and timely lesson about the world of germs.

By all initial appearances it would look as though my grandson has not yet figured out the world of germs—but perhaps he has! At a year of age my little guy is teething and drooling like a hound, and his hands have been very active. His hands are always in and out of his mouth, and when they are not in his mouth, they are handling every imaginable surface around him. This becomes especially interesting when he is outdoors and exploring the yard. Two-year-old older brother is past the teething stage, but isn't doing much better.

Though I adore my grandchildren I must confess that there are moments which cause me to feel half nauseated. Yuck! (I never promised that this lesson from my grandchildren would be cute or pleasant.) Their typical one-year-old and two-year-old behaviors offend my sense of germs and cleanliness, and all the more in these days of germ consciousness, but people like Tim Allen remind me to think again and to try to regain a reasonable perspective. There is a method to the madness of these little ones and they are actually accomplishing an important objective. These boys are building up immunities. That is how the game is played. Our temptation is to eliminate every possible germ in their environment, but this is not healthy. We keep hearing that the

increase of allergies among children may be attributed to overly clean environments. When a young immune system has no germs to work on, it goes into overdrive and reacts to pollens and dust.

As the vaccine spreads and the virus subsides it is now time to get back into the world, and a year of training in masks and distancing needs to be reconsidered. This all reminds me of Jesus' sending his disciples into the hazardous world. On the night of his betrayal, He prayed that they would be protected from the temptations and evils of the world, but He very clearly wanted them to get out and into circulation. We too need to get into fuller circulation in a world which needs us badly. Of course, wisdom is necessary in all of this, whether it be the world of germs or the realms of good and evil. There are evils around which we are wise to carefully avoid, and there are certain environments in which my grandsons do not belong. May God guide us.

Now is the time to get back into ministry and service. While we have been focusing upon the dangers of the virus, we have lost sight of the equal or even greater dangers of the inertia and anxiety which this past year has caused us. At the beginning of the pandemic, I shared sage counsel from C.S. Lewis as he addressed the spiritual and emotional dynamics of living in a now nuclear age. These were words worth our attention as we entered the pandemic, and they are helpful as we come out of this difficult year. I again print them for your edification after the closing prayer. Let us be wise, let us be active, and let us walk in a faith which trusts in God and overcomes fear.

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

Make us, O blessed Master, strong in heart, full of courage, fearless of danger, holding pain and danger cheap when they lie in the path of duty. May we be strengthened with all might by thy Spirit in our hearts.

—F.B. Meyer, 1847 - 1929

In one way we think a great deal too much of the atomic bomb. "How are we to live in an atomic age?" I am tempted to reply: "Why, as you would have lived in the sixteenth century when the plague visited London almost every year, or as you would have lived in a Viking age when raiders from Scandinavia might land and cut your throat any night; or indeed, as you are already living in an age of cancer, an age of syphilis, an age of

paralysis, an age of air raids, an age of railway accidents, an age of motor accidents.”

*In other words, do not let us begin by exaggerating the novelty of our situation. Believe me, dear sir or madam, you and all whom you love were already sentenced to death before the atomic bomb was invented: and quite a high percentage of us were going to die in unpleasant ways. We had, indeed, one very great advantage over our ancestors—*anesthetics*; but we have that still. It is perfectly ridiculous to go about whimpering and drawing long faces because the scientists have added one more chance of painful and premature death to a world which already bristled with such chances and in which death itself was not a chance at all, but a certainty.*

*This is the first point to be made: and the first action to be taken is to pull ourselves together. If we are all going to be destroyed by an atomic bomb, let that bomb when it comes find us doing sensible and human things—*praying, working, teaching, reading, listening to music, bathing the children, playing tennis, chatting to our friends over a pint and a game of darts—not huddled together like frightened sheep and thinking about bombs. They may break our bodies (a microbe can do that) but they need not dominate our minds.**

— “On Living in an Atomic Age” (1948) in *Present Concerns: Journalistic Essays*