

Words for an Emerging Church

Wednesday, May 19, 2021

An Appropriate Urgency

Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah. —Psalm 95:7-8

The vaccine has been with us for a while, and for a month or more we have reached the point where there is no longer any waiting. The shot is now available to anyone who wants it, and just when we thought we were nearing the finish line for this virus we discovered that a lot of people are not bothering to get it! Of course, the media is all over this story and has its favorite villains to target. The media makes everything a story about politics, so why not the vaccine? More recently the numbers have been showing that there is significant reticence in the ethnic and racial minority communities, and the news is much more reserved in addressing this finding. Public health officials grieve over these trends and are commonly heard to voice their frustration in finding the right public relations campaign to sell the vaccine. (My deep desire is that these folks would stop trying to design some slick advertisement and would instead try communicating the facts about the vaccines, good and bad, to the public so that they can make informed decisions.) Only time will tell just where all this will lead.

I myself have long been a supporter of vaccines and am saddened by the slowdown in willing recipients. There are a number of common reasons that folks avoid getting vaccinated, and though I would have trouble proving it, I am convinced that I know the biggest reason for not getting the shot. People just can't get around to doing it. No one likes shots, and besides, "I'm busy." "The shots aren't available when I'm not working." "I can't afford to take the day off after the shot when I might be feeling a little beat up." The list of excuses goes on with the bottom line being that folks just don't feel that they have the time. Just about the time I began to suspect this cause of vaccination resistance we had an ICU nurse speak to our Sunday school. She spoke of her young adult son who just can't get around to getting the shot.

It seems absurd that not so long ago we were living in a deep fear of the virus and were feeling desperate for some kind of relief. Many were in a panic. Now we have a vaccine, the case levels and hospitalizations are dropping, methods of treatment are being found and the fatalities are greatly reduced. This is not over, but we are in a much safer place. Now, without a nagging sense of fear many will not find sufficient reason to go through the hassles of getting vaccinated. This seems almost laughable, but as a pastor I am well aware of spiritual crises which play out in the same way. It is common for people to be in a difficult and frightening situation—perhaps a near

death experience—and to cry out to God with great urgency. God is faithful and the crisis passes, and the promises to draw nearer to God and to be a better Christian are soon forgotten. Without a sense of immediate urgency there seems no reason to amend one's life and to make peace with God. We see the same scenario played out in the Old Testament when God's people seemed to bounce back and forth from one extreme to the other: an urgent time of crisis and crying out to God, and then in comfortable times a spiritual laziness which ignored the Almighty.

Let us pray for an appropriate sense of urgency to take hold of our nation. We don't need any more fear and gloom mongers to be spreading anxiety across our land, nor do we need a lazy sense that this crisis is over when there is still business to tend to. And while we are praying, let us pray all the more for people to have an appropriate sense of urgency in their relationship with God! Jesus came to bring us back into relationship to God. This Good News sounds wonderful to most folks—so wonderful that they just might get around to doing something about it someday! There are times in the Bible when God speaks of *today* as the day of salvation, and *now* as the appropriate moment to make peace with God. This is not voiced as a scare tactic or an emotional manipulation. It is simply good sense, for tomorrow may be too late, and there is no reason for delay. It shouldn't require a disaster to get us off the dime.

I close with an old story about the importance of living with a reasonable urgency. The Devil was deeply distressed that so many were finding life in Jesus Christ and fewer folks were ending up in his domain. So, he called a meeting of all his demons to decide what should be done. Three demons offered advice. The first stepped forward and said, "Let's convince the world that there is no heaven." But they realized that the truth of heaven was too well known, and this strategy would not work. The second demon stepped up and said, "Let's tell the world that there is no hell." This sounded better than the first suggestion, but again, people were not going to be fooled so easily. Finally, the third demon stepped forward with the evil wisdom which carried the day. "Let's convince them that there is no hurry!"

Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

O God, by whom the meek are guided in judgment, and light rises up in darkness for the godly; give us, in all our doubts and uncertainties the grace to ask what thou wouldst have us to do that the spirit of wisdom may save us from all false choices, and that in thy light we may see light and in thy straight path may not stumble; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

—William Bright, 1824-1901