

Pastor's Update, Saturday, August 1, 2020

Happy Saturday WFMC Family! As usual, here are the links to tomorrow's "gatherings:"

Sunday Worship (all links will be live by 6:00 a.m., Sunday)

[WFMC YouTube Channel video service](#)

[WFMC Truthcasting/podcast message only audio](#)

[WFMC Facebook page, for Facebook users](#)

[WFMC 8:30a Livestream Service](#)

Print editions of all messages are available at [the church web site as well...click here.](#)

In-Person Worship: Once again, both the Quick Facts and the Full Explanation / FAQ documents have been updated. If you've not checked these out, [please do so here.](#) Those who are immune-compromised, feeling ill in any way, or who are in vulnerable age categories, please worship at home using one of the electronic methods.

We've realized that in the live stream, it appears as though we are not social distancing in the sanctuary. That is actually a trick of the camera. All rows are six feet apart, but from behind, you can't really tell that. Just FYI.

Also Regarding In-Person Worship: In last Saturday's Pastor's Update, I mentioned that the number of positive COVID cases in Jessamine County was relatively stable. That was not so. I was using numbers / averages that were a few days old...because I wrote that part of the update a few days before Saturday, and I did not re-check the numbers before sending. In reality, cases in our county jumped pretty dramatically on Thursday, Friday and Saturday especially. Thankfully, the number of positive cases dropped again on Sunday and have been down most of this week. All that to say, 1) I'm sorry for giving old, and errant, information last Saturday, and, 2) I want you to know the church leadership is keeping an eye on case numbers, hospitalizations and other data related to this in the interest of making good decisions about meeting in person, helping to 'flatten the curve,' and just being a loving witness to our neighbors in our choices. It's not a perfect science and there are a variety of opinions about what our response should look like, but know that we're doing our best. Pray for wisdom please, as circumstances change quickly.

By the way, here are a couple good tools to help us all keep track of what's going on along those lines close to home, should you be interested. [Weather Channel](#) [Jessamine County Health Department](#)

ABF Meetings: [Click here for the most current list of ABFs and their meeting arrangements,](#) and note these changes:

Café Berea ABF returns to on-campus meetings this Sunday, August 2, Building C, Great Hall. Zoom available.

Wrestling With Truth ABF plans to return to on-campus meetings August 23. Zoom available.

Layman's Class ABF returns to on-campus meetings August 30, Sanctuary

Young Married Couple's Alliance (YMCA) is meeting at Kinlaw Park located on Kinlaw Drive in the Talbott Subdivision each Sunday at 10:00. Bring a chair or blanket and enjoy the breeze that God has given us each week under the pavilion. [For inclement weather they will unite on Zoom.](#)

YBF (Youth Bible Fellowships)

Our Youth Bible Fellowships are taking a break from Zoom this week...but...all youth are welcome to attend a meeting in the Sanctuary following morning worship (9:30a) to discuss what the YBFs will look like this fall.

Wednesday Night Ministries have re-started. [Click here for all the details.](#)

On Angels In our Sunday morning study of the book of Jude, we've encountered more references to angels than most of us have. Toward understanding some things about angels and "celestial beings," you might want to [check out this link to the Bible Project.](#) Also, [clicking here will take you to a podcast](#) that explores all the concepts in the videos. (Thank you to Jessica Bowers for these resources!)

Below Are a Couple Good Articles (admittedly both happen to be from my alma mater - ha) making good points on 1) Civil Discourse, and, 2) COVID “Experts.” I’ve found them both helpful and hope you do as well.

Playground Newly Mulched! Thanks to all (about 20 people) who came and helped rake mulch on a sultry summer night this past Tuesday!



And Finally, in the Interest of Keeping Our Sense of Humor About All This:

Fuzzy Sabbath Logic, from Matthew 12

Matthew 12.9 Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, 10 and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, they asked him, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” . . . 14 But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.

Lesson: For the Pharisees it’s sinful to heal on the Sabbath, but OK to plot murder.

Peace and Blessings, Sisters and Brothers, Pastor Daryl

True Diversity, True Freedom—Honoring Conscience

July 28, 2020 Benjamin V. Porter Institute for Faith and Freedom, Grove City College

I am a Protestant and my friend, Joe, is Roman Catholic. Occasionally, when I discover someone is Catholic, I joke, “Hey, our spiritual ancestors burned each other at the stake.” Generally, I say this once I know the person somewhat and know the person can handle humor. Joe was one such person, and we hit it off quickly. Joe, like me, is a practitioner of diversity and liberty, including religious liberty.

There was another duo a century ago that walked a similar path: J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis. Lewis was Protestant and Tolkien was Catholic, and the man who did heavy lifting converting Lewis.

Tolkien and Lewis saw much through the same lens. Both were brilliant scholars familiar with history, literature, and languages. Both were prolific writers and their books shaped generations to come. They wrote fantasy literature, letting spiritual themes and allusions speak for themselves, although they were certainly capable of apologetics. Ultimately, they sought to build a kind of bridge from heaven to earth, and the world could not help but be enraptured by their work. These men had so much in common, but they also had one glaring difference: While Tolkien converted Lewis, he did not convert him to Catholicism. Lewis died a Protestant. Did this mean the end of their friendship? Not at all.

Joe was able to take my initial joke and return a jab, but without malice or insult. In fact, Joe’s defense to my critiques of Catholicism was one of patience and kindness. He completely reframed my initial presumptions of certain Catholic dogmas, genuinely trying to explain the why behind the how. For example, he would tell me that he prayed to Saint Stephen for me, even when I insisted he didn’t need to. While I disagree with his belief that saints can serve as intercessors, I could not help but be slightly disarmed that he wanted to pray for me.

Civil debate is a lost art. It still occurs at the margins, but the highway of differing opinion is crowded by social media and woke journalism, which are not modes exactly designed for helpful and even pleasurable disagreement. In this day and age, how could two people on opposite ends of a spectrum possibly enjoy disagreeing with each other, let alone on hot topics of politics and religion? There are two major principles which guide the conversations between Joe and I: commitment to truth and commitment to the other.

Commitment to the truth is the telos of debate. When probing deep truths there are laws to conversation which allow it to progress. Among them, the identity of the speaker does not determine whether the speaker's argument is valid. Race, sex, religion, or any other such category has no effect on whether the person's argument holds to reason.

It's also important when advocating our positions to seek areas of agreement as well as difference. The reason Joe and I hit it off was because we found we had read many of the same thinkers, and agreed on many subjects, particularly areas where most people are uncomfortable going. Joe was also not afraid to pursue truth. He had intellectual courage, and he welcomed disagreement in the hopes of learning.

But what completely took me by surprise was Joe's charity. This is what I call commitment to the other, and it allows the conversation to be fair and amiable. I tend to become wholly concentrated on the validity of someone's reasoning and then focus on flaws in their argument. Joe could think just as critically as me, but his position felt much less like an attack and more like an invitation. He doesn't simply try to win intellectual battles; he tries to win people's hearts. He wants to convert, not destroy.

In short, we became friends and learned how to enjoy disagreement. Like Tolkien and Lewis, we can talk for hours and enrich each other's worldviews.

At the heart of this is a love and respect for religious liberty. Religious liberty is the idea that people believe different things, and they ought not to be punished by law for those differences. Importantly, that principle is not infinite. If one's religion calls for the sacrifice of babies to Moloch, this would not be permitted because it would violate the right to life. But beyond transgressing the natural rights of life, liberty, and property, religious liberty is an essential.

Religious liberty is of utmost importance because it is a subset of freedom of conscience. James Madison wrote that a man's conscience is "his most valuable possession." If a man does not have the right to his own conscience, what liberty is left? To try and detain someone's conscience through the use of governmental force is the peak of tyranny.

I am thankful for the lessons I have learned from my friend Joe on how to disagree in a constructive way that promotes camaraderie. I hope our society, especially religious believers, can look at the way Tolkien and Lewis remained fast friends. It takes moral and intellectual courage and love for others to pull this off in a winsome way. Let us strive for these ideals together and revive them in American culture.

Summer 2020 COVID-19 Data in Pennsylvania: What We Don't Know

July 29, 2020 Gary L. Welton Institute for Faith and Freedom, Grove City College

The COVID-19 coronavirus is a novel virus, and all who claim they have it figured out are living under an illusion. Our knowledge is growing, but it is still very fragmented. Our local politicians have been cautious because of the vast unknown; we have never been here before.

Our educational leaders have been (and will be making) significant decisions about the new school year. What are the risks of returning to the traditional classroom? And what are the risks of not returning to the classroom? Because of the vast unknowns, the decision makers are operating in a largely and regrettably no-win scenario.

We know that the number of positive cases in the United States is up dramatically this summer. The number of deaths has also been growing, and every one of these individual deaths represents a heartbreaking story. Yet the escalating death rates are still well below the numbers from April and early May.

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania experienced a very high number of cases and deaths in March and April but has not seen the dramatic summer spikes common in the southern states (though there are concerns about the recent spikes in Western Pennsylvania). The data show a change in the relationship between the number of new cases and the number of deaths in the last six weeks. The recent data points reflect both fewer cases and fewer deaths. If you look at the data through the spring, there was a very strong correlation between the number of new cases and the number of deaths, reaching a correlation as high as .92. Over the last three weeks, however, the correlation has approached zero (.07).

This raises the burning question, for which I wish we had the definitive answer, namely: Why?

Why are the death rates across the country much lower during a time when the number of new cases is skyrocketing? There are many potential answers, some of which are reassuring; others, not so much. It is likely that more than one of these factors is playing a role.

- 1. Many of the new cases are among younger Americans, for whom the risks have always been much lower.*
- 2. We are using better strategies in our nursing homes than we used in the early months. Indeed, we are avoiding some horrific decisions in which nursing homes were required to accept COVID cases.*
- 3. Medical data have shown that some of the ICU treatment protocols being used early on were simply wrong and made recovery less likely rather than more likely. We have learned from the data and changed treatment protocols as a result.*
- 4. Just give it another week or two, and we might see the death rates soar.*
- 5. The virus exists in various strains, some of which are more virulent than others. Many of the recent local cases may represent people infected with a weaker strain. This perspective has been suggested by Dr. Graham Snyder, University of Pittsburgh Medical Center medical director for infection prevention, during a press briefing. The weaker strain might indicate a mutation in the virus. It was indeed such a mutation that finally brought the flu pandemic of 1918 to an end.*
- 6. The data include so many errors as to be unuseful.*

Grove City College, where I am a professor, is located in Mercer County, a county that has seen a spike in new cases over the last several weeks. In fact, the number of new cases has doubled, and the county is considered to be a hot spot in the commonwealth. We still need to be diligent and careful in the way we live our lives.

While there are still many concerns, the data suggest that summer 2020 is less risky than the spring. Nevertheless, the risks continue. Be careful in how you read and understand the arguments that you see on social media. It is still a novel virus. Those who make dogmatic statements (from whatever perspective) will likely be shown to be wrong.

We have been told in our state to wear face masks, and it does appear that more people are doing so. Nevertheless, many people are wearing them incorrectly (not covering their noses, for example), and many are removing them when they speak (and hence when the risks of transmission are higher.)

The current data are promising, yet still concerning. Ultimately, history may show which of the six explanations (or perhaps some seventh one) turns out to be most accurate. Some of these predict improving results; some predict deteriorating scenarios. Until we have that historical perspective, caution is still required.

Every morning I simply pray, "Lord, help me not to behave in a way that makes this situation worse for even one other person. Let me be part of the solution; not part of the problem."