

## Caring for The Whole Body

In the past year, our vocabulary has grown to include all kinds of new terms: “social distancing”, “pandemic fatigue”, “virtual church”, and even “drive-thru communion”! A newer one that we’ve been hearing in the news more and more is “vaccine hesitancy”. As vaccines become more readily available in our country and local community, many are hesitant or wary to receive them. There are all sorts of different reasons for this: some are unsure about the long-term impacts of the vaccine, some aren’t sure they work at all, some have heard rumors of a microchip being inserted into a person’s arm, some are opposed to the measures that scientists took to create and test the vaccine. Many believe that their faith inhibits them from receiving the vaccine.

Many have understood the decision about receiving the vaccine as one that primarily affects them. But, like mask-wearing and distancing, this is not the case—we have learned throughout this pandemic the truth that the precautions we take directly affect our neighbor’s health and well-being. Even though I may not be afraid of contracting COVID-19, I am aware that I could pass it on to someone with a much weaker immune system. We are not islands—we were made by God for connection and relationship, and that has consequence. In 1 Corinthians 12:21-26, the apostle Paul writes:

*The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’, nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.*

We are one body. Our decisions about precautions and vaccines are not ones that only affect us—they are decisions that our faith convicts us to make with the well-being of the whole body in mind.

As Lutherans the cornerstone of our faith is a fervent belief in God’s gracious love which has been poured out for us in Jesus Christ. We hold fast to the commandment to love God and love our neighbor, trusting that the grace we have been set free by empowers us to turn in love toward the world. We are, in Jesus’ name, called to be community-minded. We also hold fast to a belief that God blesses the world by giving us each unique strengths and talents by which to serve God and our neighbor—this is the source of our vocation. Martin Luther said that “the Christian shoemaker does his duty not by putting little crosses on the shoes, but by making good shoes.” We serve God by living out our vocations and are blessed by God when others do this as well.

The scientists who have been working to create vaccines to help reduce the contraction, impact, and spread of COVID-19 are living out their God-given vocation. By this work we are blessed, not cursed. We are blessed because we have been given an opportunity to participate in creating a safer and healthier environment for the sake of our neighbor. When he was surviving the plague in 16th century Germany, Martin Luther wrote this:

*Therefore, I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine, and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance infect and pollute others, and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. If God should wish to take me, he will surely find me and I have done what he has expected of me and so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of others. If my neighbor needs me, however, I shall not avoid place or person but will go freely, as stated above. See, this is such a God-fearing faith because it is neither brash nor foolhardy and does not tempt God.*

We are called to take and administer medicine, help purify the air, and trust the science we are blessed by. This is an exercise of our faith—by placing our trust in the science, we exhibit trust in God’s power. There are all sorts of rumors flying around about this vaccine, but dear ones, this vaccine is a gift. It is new, and of course makes us nervous as all new things do, but it does not contain a microchip, it is effective, it is safe, and it comes from the God-given gifts of scientists we are called to trust. Even more than that, our faith convicts us to receive it as it becomes available to us, as it benefits and protects our neighbor.

Thanks be to God for blessing us with such incredible gifts.  
*In peace, Pastor Marissa*