

5 September 2021

Dear Friends of Elmwood,

At times like this, I remember a satirical cartoon that made me laugh out loud, even though I was all by myself when I saw it. It might have appeared in *The New Yorker*.

It was drawn by a legendary American cartoonist, Jules Feiffer. It showed God, bearded and be-gowned, sitting on a cloud. An angel faced him. He was a Moses look-alike with wings and a halo. He had God's attention. Their conversation spread across six separate 'panels', and it went something like this:

*Angel:* So, you created everything.

*God:* Yes.

*Angel:* Including black holes.

*God:* Yes.

*Angel:* Which will eventually swallow up everything.

*God:* Yes.

*Angel:* Including you.

*God:* [no reply]

*Angel stares at God in silence.*

*God stares at Angel in silence.*

*God:* I'm working on that.

I wonder if our health authorities feel they've been backed into a similar kind of corner. Are they working on a Covid 'exit plan' that they themselves cannot envision? I haven't heard a clear and convincing answer. Perhaps there isn't one.

Over seventy-seven percent of people over twelve years of age in Ontario have now been 'double jabbed', i.e. fully vaccinated. Soon it will be eighty percent, surely.

Now, many months ago I'd have thought – using that delusive sort of 'magical thinking' that 'science people' associate with 'humanities people' (doubly so if they're loony clergy) – I'd have thought that when vaccinations as successful as *these* are purported to be had reached as many arms as they now have, we'd have arrived at the medical equivalent of 'the kingdom of God'.

Not that the lion would lie down with the lamb, and there'd be no more sighing and weeping, but that Covid would have been roundly put in its place, and that we'd all have returned to *our* place in that 'normal' world we once knew but are, I'm afraid, quickly losing and forgetting.

Alas, no. The immunity conferred by vaccinations, though very high, is never one hundred percent, so the virus can still 'break through' and some of us will still fall ill. Yet we *always* knew that was possible. So where's the kingdom?

Still, vaccinations reduce the severity of the illness, don't they? That should reduce our worry drastically. Yes, but even a vaccinated person can spread the infection if they contract it. And of course, there are virulent variants now. They're more contagious, so the *risk* of potential infection is even higher, and stupendously higher among the unvaccinated. Hospital ICUs might still become overstressed.

We're not there yet.

So, what now? I don't know, do you? Masks, distancing, avoiding people, yada, yada, yada. The kingdom of God has not yet arrived, and it may never.

Am I wrong to fear that the scientific tool we've hoped for and relied upon – vaccines – will *never* be deemed 'successful enough' to return our lives to 'normal'? Am I wrong to wonder if we're now *so* 'risk averse', and so fearful of any chance of a potential infection, that we'll never feel safe enough, never feel ready to return to normal life, no matter how slim the potential for infection turns out to be?

When will it be 'safe enough' to return to normal life? Let me pluck some numbers out of the air and write them out as words the way 'humanities people' do to infuriate 'science people'. If we have a ten percent chance of falling ill from Covid after we've been vaccinated, is that still unacceptable? What about one percent? One tenth of a percent? One thousandth?

I wish someone would say when it's safe enough, or come clean and tell us it never *will* be safe enough. And why.

Early on, I remember some 'Cassandras' – (Cassandra was a classical figure who prophesied the future correctly, but no one ever believed her) – saying that we will just have to learn to live Covid, masks, social distancing, and all the rest of it. Forever. Like climate change, it's not going away.

These thoughts pressed themselves upon me this week because the Session decided that we can open the sanctuary once again to Public Worship.

The doors will open on Sunday, September 5. Services will happen at 9 a.m. and 10:30 a.m.

I should be happier about this than I am. To me, it feels like a 'Pyrrhic Victory' (Google it). That's because we will return to worship not as we used to enjoy it, before we'd ever heard of Covid, but just as we did twelve months ago, for a few weeks.

We will not sing. There will be no Choir. There will be no celebration of Holy Communion. Just a 'talking head' behind a mask (me, I'm afraid), interrupted by the odd 'Amen' and 'Lord, hear our prayer' on your part, also behind a mask.

Mind you, God will be there too, wanting to hear us, speak to us, and above all to bless us.

So, there's *that*. (There. I just cheered myself up a bit.)

At some point, our society will have to do the kind of moral triage that dares to cast its eye as widely as it can. Our society may not be up to this task. But if it is, it will require a more-than-scientific mind. It will require an open mind with a wide field of vision, one un-blinkered and wise enough to understand that our *human* well-being is so much more than our *physical* well-being.

So, it would have to take into account so much more than our medical welfare, wouldn't it? Its scope would have to include our social, political, economic, psychological, and spiritual welfare too. For this is where life is truly lived.

But I'm a 'humanities guy'. I would say that, wouldn't I?

Yours in the faith,  
Andrew