

Another view of the lessons of history –

Life's everyday risks and choices

By Chuck Cook

If you can believe the news reports and polls, about a third of Americans say they would not take any of the available COVID-19 vaccines even if they were readily available. Many of the doubters polled – including about the same percentage of health care workers – are leery of anything involving recombinant DNA, and others cite the lack of any long-term studies providing statistical evidence that there are no adverse, long-term consequences of taking the vaccines.

Unfortunately, the history of vaccination safety and efficacy in the U.S. and elsewhere in the world substantiates those fears, even though the percentages of collateral damage are relatively insignificant in most cases. Nevertheless, we all make choices in life that involve risks and

rewards and do not always make decisions that are in our own best interest or that are in the interest of those around us.

Two weeks ago, my wife and I faced the decision of being inoculated with the Pfizer vaccine, which was available almost immediately, or deferring it in the hope that better information on the long-term effects would become available. We chose to accept the invitation of Abbeville Area Medical Center to schedule an appointment and dutifully appeared at their vaccination center at 2 p.m. the following day.

Our reasons for doing so included the following: (1) Our age and medical backgrounds placed us in a high-risk category for which contracting the coronavirus would have placed us in potentially life-threatening circumstances. (2) We both

lead very active lives that frequently necessitate our presence in public or family meetings, gatherings and locations that bring us into contact with those who may be infected and who may be placed at risk if we were to become infected ourselves. (3) We recognized that although we were simply two individuals, we were also an integral part of the human and community “herds” for which immunity is critically important for any semblance of a return to a pre-pandemic lifestyle. (4) Failing to take advantage of an opportunity to be vaccinated may have had an adverse impact on the ability of AAMC or other service providers to utilize their available doses and to obtain additional doses to inoculate those who may also be at risk.

I am also happy to report that despite a few administrative glitches in completing all of the paperwork involved – which have since been corrected – the inoculations themselves were quickly done and virtually pain-free. There were a few minor aches in our arms the following day, but they disappeared within a few hours.

What is not so encouraging is that our state ranks virtually last in the percentage of population that has received COVID-19 vaccinations, even though we rank fifth in the nation – based on the latest available surveys – of the percentage of available vaccine doses that have actually been administered. In effect, we are doing a great job of using the vaccines once we receive them, but are simply not getting enough doses to inoculate a large percentage of our citizens.

The vaccine supply chain problems South Carolina has encountered, based on testimony at recent hearings before the state legislature in Columbia and national news reports, are based on two factors. First, the federal government has decided to concentrate vaccine distribution in three states – New York, California and Texas – and second, the SC Department of Health and Environmental Control has concentrated its distribution of vaccines up to this point to the larger service providers in the state, e.g., Prisma, which are principally located in metropolitan areas like Charleston, Greenville, Spartanburg and Columbia.

The overall impact of these decisions, unfortunately, has been to delay the distribution of substantial quantities of the available vaccines to most states and particularly to rural areas. The problem has also been compounded, at least in South Carolina, by the dispute between the governor's office and the state legislature as to whether to prioritize the vaccination of teachers at the expense of vulnerable category A1 recipients who are 65 years of age or older. Both sides in the dispute have made strong cases to support their positions.

In effect, the coronavirus pandemic has forced the nation and its states – as well as all of its citizens – to make difficult, if not impossible, decisions and choices regarding our personal health and safety, our economy and the education of our children. So, too, these decisions are not about the science involved, but rather the politics of who gets what, when and where. The sooner we recognize this the better. Let's just hope our politicians make wise choices on our behalf.

By Kittye Craig – Jackson
From a New Hope Baptist pew

When hard times come, it's totally natural to ask, “How do I get out of this?”

Life is filled with all kinds of suffering. Some of us are suffering in a bad marriage and our spouses just won't get their act together, childhood abuse, feeling unloved and/or wondering why we were born, and those feelings feel so lethal.

The fleshly reaction is to get out of the suffering one way or the other. But God has other ideas. In Romans 5:3-4, Paul says, “Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.”

Suffering is a tool that God uses to form us and to mold us to deepen our intimacy with Christ. Rather than the fleshly response of trying to get out, we can choose to ask, “All right, I'm in this trial, and I don't want to waste it. Lord, how are You going to use this suffering to grow me, to deepen my walk with Jesus?”

It's a recalibration of the mindset from flesh to Spirit, and it works in every suffering. Every difficulty we face is an opportunity to become more like Christ and experience Christ more intimately. But please hear me: God does not expect you to endure physical or sexual abuse in the name of suffering producing growth. If your spouse is abusing you, tell someone in your church whom you trust or another authority who can intervene.

If you were asked to describe your life right now, would you say it's a ho-hum, barely-make-it-through-the-day kind of life? Or the abounding, overflowing, deeply rich and satisfying life of Christ living through you?

Pain has a power. Paul kept asking for his “thorn” to be removed. He got a direct lesson in pain's power from the Lord himself. Jesus told Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

That message, as well as the messenger, should give us a tremendous boost.

“When I am weak, then I am strong,” Paul said. And that's the power of pain.

Have you noticed how people listen to people in pain with a special intensity? People watch those who are hurting to see what matters most to them. If the pain is great enough, you'll find out where the strength of a person really lies. You'll see the character on the inside that inspires all of us.

There is some pain so great, it seems impossible to bear. In that place, only God can meet the need or heal the heart. Unfortunately, it is in that place of greatest pain, and there alone, that the discovery can be made.

There's power in pain. Like nothing else, it can introduce us to the power of God. But the lesson is so difficult, the only way any of us would discover it is that God allows pain to be a part of our lives.

Pain happens. Pain has a purpose. And pain has a power. The beauty of a single pearl, or a string of the precious stones, is unmistakable. Few jewels capture the eye quite like a perfect pearl.

Know how the pearl came to be? In the beginning, it's only a grain of sand. That tiny, little irritant slips inside the tight seal of an oyster's shell and immediately causes discomfort. With no way to expel the grain of sand, with no way to ease the pain, the oyster coats the sand with a layer of the inner lining of its shell to make the sand smooth. This still

Turn your pain into power

does not ease the oyster's suffering. Again and again the oyster coats the sand, but all the attempts to get rid of the irritant have little effect.

As far as an oyster is concerned, what we call a “pearl” is nothing more than great suffering. But one day the oyster is fished from the water and opened. The gem inside has amazing beauty and holds great value – all because the oyster had great suffering.

Maybe it's no accident that the 12 gates of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:21) are made of pearls. It's the suffering of our Savior that allows the gate to be there in the first place ... and more than likely, all who enter those priceless gates will have also known the personal cost of great suffering.

As a teenager and still today when going through severe pain, I pray, “Jesus, be my strength and the patience in my life and in all relationships. Use every difficulty I face

to draw me into deeper intimacy with You. Show me what I can learn from these hard times; make me more like Jesus because of them. Amen.”

You cannot go through this life without pain. It is pain that shows us that something is out of order so that we can get it back into order. Pain is a sign that you are growing. If you are ever going to birth anything into this world, you must labor. Endure the hard labor. Don't quit because it's hard; quit because it's complete. If you are going to do anything meaningful, lasting or worthy, there will be some parts of your journey that will be extremely hard ... I'm a witness!



JP Narichetti named pastor of Good Shepherd Catholic Church and Sacred Heart Church



Father JP Narichetti, administrator of Good Shepherd Catholic Church in McCormick and Sacred Heart Church in Abbeville has been named pastor of both parishes by the Most Rev. Robert Guglielmone, bishop of the Charleston diocese. Father JP, right, recited his pastoral vow with his hand on the Book of Gospels, held by Msgr. Gregory B. Wilson, V.F., left, head of the Aiken Deanery, on Sat., Feb. 13.

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Old Devil's Letter to the Young

C.S. Lewis wrote this in 1942. It is chilling how closely it mirrors where we are today. Although written over 70 years ago, it reads like it could have been written last week. It's from a book he wrote called "The Screwtape Letters." Fascinating read, definitely worth your time.

"One young devil asked the older one, 'How did you manage to bring so many souls to hell?'"

"The old devil responded, 'I instilled fear in them!'"

'Great job!' the youngster said. 'And what were they afraid of? Wars? Hunger?'"

"No, they were afraid of the disease!' the older devil replied.

"Does that mean they didn't get sick? Are they not dead? There was no rescue for them?'"

"The old devil answered, 'No, they got sick, died and the rescue was there.'"

"The young devil was surprised, 'Then I don't understand?'"

"The old devil answered, 'You know they believed the only thing they have to keep at any cost is their lives.'"

"They stopped hugging and greeting each other. They moved away from each other. They gave up all social contacts and everything that was human!"

"Later they ran out of money, lost their jobs, but that was their choice because they were afraid for their lives, that's why they quit their jobs without even having bread."

"They believed blindly everything they heard and read in the papers."

"They gave up their freedoms, they didn't leave their own homes to go anywhere. They stopped visiting family and friends. The world turned into a concentration camp, without even forcing them into captivity."

"They accepted everything!!! Just to live at least one more miserable day. And so living, they died every day!!!"

"And that's how it was very easy for me to take their miserable souls to hell ..."

-C.S. Lewis
"Old Devil's Letter to the Young," 1942
2 Chronicles 7:14
-The Modern Day Noah
Submitted by Evangelist Brenda Moore

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Michael Allen, Pastor
Michelle Allen, Children & Youth Director

COVID-19 Service Schedule

Sunday
Worship Services at 9 a.m. and 11:30 a.m.

Wednesday
Prayer Meeting 6 p.m.

Lutheran Church By The Lake
We invite you to worship with us.

SUNDAY MORNING 8:00 & 10:30 A.M.

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