

Pastoral Letter
January 22, 2021

COVID and Vaccines

I hope all of you have gone to my blog and read the resources about this topic that are posted there. If you have not yet, please do so (thesoberpeasant.blogspot.com). It is important that you be informed, and there is much more there than I can say here. AND, I will keep adding resources to that post when they are available, so check back, too. For example, our LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations is working on guidance as I write.

Why haven't they come out with anything yet? Because this is a difficult issue to address and there is so much to consider. We're still learning about COVID itself, about the vaccines, and the side effects of both. All these things need to be taken into consideration, as well as you, your conscience, your vocations, and your vulnerability.

So to the question, *Should I get vaccinated?* there is not a simple yes or no answer. It is not so black and white. Was the vaccine researched and developed using aborted fetal tissue? Is this tissue involved in its ongoing production? What if it was tested with this tissue but it is not in its ongoing production? Many advances in vaccine development were made in unethical ways and using aborted fetal tissue - does that make *all* vaccines unethical? Is it even *possible* to do research now without relying on *some* knowledge perhaps unethically gained? And then what are the side effects of COVID that we are still discovering? Side effects from the vaccines to consider? Sometimes it seems there are so many questions and no good answer!

I am not a trained ethicist, but I am your pastor, and so want to provide you with some guidance. That's the reason for the post on my blog, for you to read about these things in much more detail, and think through these questions and their implications. Of course, I am always available to talk about these things with you more.

There is a wide spectrum of views on these questions and perhaps you have already heard arguments from both extremes. At one extreme are those who would say that all medical research is good, there should be no limits. Why not use aborted fetal tissue instead of "wasting" it? At the opposite extreme are those who would say that all vaccine development has been tainted and so should not be used or received. And then there is that wide spectrum in between, some of which I've already alluded to. Lots of questions that are hard to grapple with.

As the documents linked on my blog state, I think it is true that we should avoid those vaccines that contain or continue to use aborted fetal tissue in their production. To defend the value and sanctity of life is important in what we both say AND do. The good news is that not all the vaccines do. But here's where the issue becomes thornier - *where to draw the line?* Are *all* vaccines tainted? Only those using fetal tissue in production? Those who used it in research and development but *not* in production? Those that were only tested in this way? And how do you answer such questions?

And who should be immunized? Everyone? Only those vulnerable? What about undesirable side effects? What about the fact that over 99% of young, healthy people survive this virus? Are you responsible for others? Will your decision impact others? More to consider . . .

So think about these things! *All* of them! Be informed. Ask questions. Talk to others. Pray. If you decide to be immunized, know which vaccine is being given and whether that is one you want or to ask for another.

What if you unknowingly received a COVID vaccine (or any other vaccine, for that matter), that used aborted fetal tissue - what then? *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace* (Ephesians 1:7). We live under grace as children of God! Not that we will knowingly, willfully, or wantonly sin! But our confidence and righteousness rest not in what we do, but solely in the grace and mercy of God.

So as this time of pandemic drags on and on - we are approaching the one year anniversary of when everything was shut down! - it is easy to grow weary and despair. Don't! We're not the first to face ongoing and difficult times. As Paul wrote to the Galatian Christians, *And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up* (Galatians 6:9). In Christ, we always have hope, and He is our strength.

Give thanks to God for the blessing and gift of medicine and medical research. It has helped us in innumerable ways. But like any gift of God, it can be abused and misused. So pray not only for wisdom and guidance for yourself, but also for those who are researching and developing treatments, cures, and vaccines, that they would do their work ethically and with regard for the sanctity and value of all human life.

And give thanks also for those who guide and inform us about these issues. Theologians and ethicists from many different denominations are wrestling with these issues.

Finally, remember that in Christ, we have a life that death cannot end! Unless Christ returns first, we are all going to die - if not of COVID, then of something else, even if just old age. No one gets to escape that. You may not like to think about that, but we can, because we know that to Jesus, death is just sleep, and that we will awaken in the resurrection just like we awaken each morning. What a glorious day that will be! And glorious it will be for all who are in Christ, whose sins are forgiven, who are dearly loved children of God. *For you!*

So do not fear. Don't be so afraid of dying that we become afraid of living. You have life! Life in Christ. Rejoice! And rest in His peace.

His servant and yours,

Pastor Douthwaite