

This is Why We Don't Leave the Weak, the Sick and the Old Behind

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Reflection for Sunday, May 3, 2020

St. Paul's, Hamilton

Acts 2:42-47; Psalm 23; 1 Peter 2:19-25; John 10:1-10

On April 16, Dr. Oz argued to send children back to school, stating that the overall mortality rate would *only* be 2 – 3%. He later apologized, but only out of fear that his ratings might suffer.

On April 17, Dan Patrick, Lieutenant Governor of Texas, argued for the reopening of the economy, on the grounds that, and I quote, “There are more important things than living!” and that “Grandparents would be happy to sacrifice their lives for the economy!”

Throughout the United States throngs of people, including churches, are protesting the isolation orders so they can get their hair done, and eat dinner at Applebee's once again.

Sometimes, under stress, we forget who we are. All those people are all following in the footsteps of the 18th century economist Thomas Robert Malthus. He saw famine, disease and war as good things because they eliminated the weak, sick and poor, and left society a better place for the strong, healthy and wealthy. Of course, Malthus was a Christian Minister, who thought that killing off the weak would create heaven on earth.

19th century philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche said that the idea of caring for the poor was a poison that would destroy society, and that the weak and poor must be left to die so that society can be filled with *superior* people. Although, I doubt that most of the anti-lockdown protesters in Alabama have been reading Nietzsche recently.

It is important for us to talk about the ideas of Malthus and Nietzsche, because those ideas are often just beneath the surface of a civilized society, and in a time of stress,

any society might be tempted to sacrifice its weak and sick for the so called *good* of the greater community. Jewish and Christian scripture call for us to regard the weak, the sick and the vulnerable with the highest regard. Why does God want us to care for vulnerable people?

Perhaps we strive to create a community which cares for the weak as insurance against the day when we become weak. But there is more to it than that.

Perhaps it is because we know that we are all connected, and if one suffers then we all suffer. That idea still has an element of self interest. Morality must have a stronger foundation than that.

The true reasons for caring for the weak are found at the very core of our theology, and in our understanding of the very nature of God.

In Jewish scripture, God constantly calls his people to care for the weak and the poor. The law of Moses specifically lists orphans, widows and refugees as persons who should receive compassion. In the prophets, the list of persons who should be regarded with dignity is extended to the weak and the poor. These references prepare us for Christian Scripture in which Jesus commends to us care and protection for the sick and for all people whom society might otherwise ignore.

We should not be asking the question, "Why should we care for the weak?" We should recognize that the very nature of God *is* compassion for the weak. The central story of Jewish scripture is the redemption of slaves from Egypt. The central story of Christian scripture is the redemption of humanity from slavery to sin and death, the redemptive action of Jesus Christ.

The image of the Good Shepherd is about the love that reaches out to the lost and forgotten. All of scripture is about God redeeming the weak and the broken; and that's us. We should not be asking, "Why should we care for the weak?" But rather, "Why has God cared so much for us, when we are weak?"

You care for the weak because the nature of God is in you, the mind of Christ is in you. And when you help someone who is weak you do not do it for any selfish motive, you do it because you bear the image of God.

We make the mistake of thinking that we should be rewarded for our good actions. We should be realizing that when we do a good thing it is because the nature of God is in us, not because we have, by our own will, decided to be good.

Earlier we talked about Friedrich Nietzsche who said that caring for the weak was a poison that would destroy society. Early in his life, Nietzsche became ill to the point of being an invalid. He would have died, except that his mother took him in and cared for him for the rest of her life. He who advocated for letting the sick die, gladly accepted compassionate care when he became weak. If there was a great philosopher in the Nietzsche family it was not Friedrich...it was his mom.

We started out today talking about why we should care for the weak during a pandemic, why not just let them die. But we know that those who would do that are in the minority. We care for our vulnerable people. We do not care enough, and we need to reform society to make it more caring. But we care.

We care because we bear the image of God. I want you to celebrate that today. I want you to look for the evidence of God in you and in the people around you. In your time of isolation, I want you to know that God is with you, God is in you, God is love, God is compassion. And it will be compassion that redeems humanity from our present trouble.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.