

WHAT IF THE AVIAN FLU HITS US!!

FACING THE UNKNOWN FUTURE WITH FEAR AND FAITH

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When we hear the news predictions and read the stories about “what could happen” if the avian flu hits America and the rest of the world, we can get pretty fearful. The words from the experts seem to be very scary and fill us with fear. They are saying, not “if” but “when” it happens!

It is normal to have such a reaction – it is very human and real to be afraid of an unknown future event that is said to be “coming for sure, we just don’t know when”. So many of us find ourselves in a low-level panic when we think about how something like this will affect us and all our loved ones, as well as all our neighbors around the world. It is little comfort that we will all be “in this together”. That only adds to the discomfort and un-ease about what will really happen to me, to us, and what can we do about it.

At first we feel rather hopeless – there seems to be little to respond with: no real vaccines that can help us yet; medical services and hospitals will be full of very sick people, with not enough doctors, nurses, beds and equipment to go around; and who can we count on to help and care for us if most of our family and friends are also sick. Maybe my church will become a clinic or “hospice site” where people come for help. Maybe in our town we will not be able to go out of our homes or hold worship services. How will we get the food and help that we might need in our house. Very, very frightening! And then what will we do with all the grief and loss from so many people dying? It all sounds so overwhelming: fear on top of fear, and very little hope or anything to built on to calm or comfort our hearts and minds.

We would like to be able to say – O, don’t worry, it won’t happen. Or, cheer up, it is not going to be all that bad – these predictions are just intended to scare us a little, so that someone can spend a lot of money on a plan that we don’t need or won’t work.

But avoiding or denying such threats to our health and well being on a worldwide scale are not easily dismissed. From what we already know about past epidemics, we need to pay attention, not be foolish or unwise about what we can do to prepare for such a potentially disastrous event.

Let’s start with the “what ifs”. Life always brings us the “what ifs”! At times we can become almost paralyzed by the scene we construct in our minds when try to explore the “what ifs” that we may have to face. Our ability to do “what if” thinking is actually a gift from God and a needed function for our human wholeness and wellbeing. Humans are not just knee-jerk, biological response mechanisms. We are created in the image of God, which means we can use all our God-given abilities to think ahead, plan, prepare and build on aspects that can give us hope and comfort. Think about times when you did a big “what if” in your past experience. Some of it was probably helpful if it was concrete, specific and purposeful. What was probably not helpful the emotional energy that you put into worry about those things that you could not control.

The “what ifs” of life also include the reality of illness and death. But we usually quickly realize that normal human experience does include illness and death as realities that will happen to us. Do you know of any person who journeyed through life and did not face being sick and dying – not even Jesus avoided these human experiences!

This is the rest of the story: fear is not the last word when it comes to the “what ifs” of life – not even the fear of the avian flu. There is an old saying: Fear knocks on our door, but faith answered, and nothing was there” The whole good news of faith is the reality that faith is our ultimate resource when we meet any fear in life. But how does this really work?

Faith is a reality that we practice every day, in so many ways. The basis of faith is an actual relationship in which we have come to an inner realization of trust, because of our own experiences. Think about when someone did something that hurt or destroyed your trust with him or her. You needed to have new experiences in your relationship by which trust is re-born or re-established. Also, when you have been in a relationship over time, you have many actual experiences by which you know the reality of the trust between you. So it is with people, so it is with our relationship with God. We do know that people sometimes fail us, but God never fails us nor abandons us! Nothing can separate us from the love of God. God is full of faith toward us!

So, when we consider the “what ifs” and unknown future, along with the fear, we need to look deeply at how we can hope and build on the trust that has been long established. This is the essence of any faith in others and particularly, faith in God. The good news of the Gospel is that for a long, long time, God has continued to be active, creating loving relationships with us. God’s keeps the promises made to us; sustains a creation that enables us to live and thrive; gives us a biological system in our bodies that is designed for and always moves toward balance and healing; gives us daily experiences of love, grace, protection, comfort, guidance and hope that will not disappoint us. God always forgives and restores us back into a vital relationship of trust. God’s intention is that each one of us will be healed and whole. What ever the future may bring, God will be with us, as God is with us now, and has been in all the past. We are created by God, we come from God, we journey with God, and we return to God. This is the rest of the story! And is it true, not because we wish for it or can create it, but because it’s source is God, and it is the loving actions of God that make this reality constant. So we can say, Amen – it is so!

So when the avian flu comes, when any illness comes, even when death comes, we are not alone. We will not be abandoned, nor forgotten. God’s loving eyes are always upon. God’s safe, comforting arms always are present to hold us close. God’s soothing, healing touch can penetrate the deepest fear or hurt. So we can encourage, support, and remind each other that we need not fear the future, nor what will happen to us. We celebrate always the eternal presence of God with us.

Yes, fear and faith go hand in hand. The strong hand of God always holds us, no matter what! We do have the resources within ourselves, by the grace of God, to face all that life may bring us!