

Easter and Vaccine Hesitancy-A Confession

God gave me a lot of time to think about vaccination last week. On Easter Monday, after waiting 6-1/2 hours in the “drive-thru” line-up, Nurse Pam released the AstraZeneca mRNA COVID-19 vaccine into my left arm through my car window. She gave me a vaccine card and a sticker, told me to wait in the parking lot for fifteen minutes, and call 811 if I had any adverse effects. The adverse effects started at lunch half an hour later and lasted most of Bright Week. Some of them are uncannily described in Daniel 10:8, 16-17: lots of weakness, trembling, inflammatory pain in muscles and joints—all the places I had broken, sprained, had surgery started hurting again. I have not yet called 811. Still thinking about it. My daughter-in-law, who has recently returned to her work in health care after a brief mat leave, tells me “The reaction to the second dose is usually worse.” The first dose took up my reading week—maybe I better schedule my second dose during summer holidays....

Its not like I didn't read while I was sick—AstraZeneca was getting lots of coverage! By the end of the week research had shown that the mortality rate for the vaccine is about half for the disease for people who live in Ireland. Governments and even the manufacturer were recommending restricting use to people 55 and older—not because its safer for them, but because we are more likely to die of other things anyway. By the Second Sunday of Easter a team of doctors was advising cutting the dosage in half. None of these measures inspires confidence in the vaccine.... At least there did not appear to be any attempt to deceive us! (See 1st John 2:26-29). By Monday “suspicious cases” of similar syndromes had been associated with the Johnson and Johnson vaccine as well. My latent vaccine hesitancy kicked in and I announced to the four walls, “There's no way I'm going to get that booster!”

Then God began to speak through the Word. The daily lectionary for this week's Messenger includes Daniel 10:10 and following. The great angel said, *“Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words.”* Verse 18 says, *“Someone “like a son of man touched me and strengthened me. He said, “Do not fear, greatly beloved, you are safe. Be strong and courageous!”* The complementary reading from the New Testament includes these verses from 1st John 2:27 and following. *“As for you, the anointing that you received from him abides in you,”* that is, the Holy Spirit. *“And now little children, abide in him, so that when he is revealed we may have confidence...”* And just when I was losing confidence in doctors and medical researchers and public health directives, the companion psalm reminded me of my childhood doctor Day who prescribed prayer and bible reading before bedtime to overcome the insomnia brought on by a growing awareness of the fear of death. *“I will both lie down and sleep in peace; for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety”* (Psalm 4:8). It hit me like the revelation hit Daniel: this pandemic, the vaccine side effects and risks—its all part of the *“you are dust, and to this dust you shall return”* we heard on Ash Wednesday. But on Zion the imposition of ashes does not rest there, but goes on with the Gospel: *“and from this dust you shall rise again by the grace of God in Jesus Christ!”* Christ is risen!—even if I am that one in two hundred thousand, He will raise me too. If the many altruistic motives help so many people overcome their anxiety about vaccination, how much more can our faith in the resurrection strengthen us?

Let us pray: O God, source of deliverance and help, do not let our hearts be troubled, but fill us with such confidence and joy that we may sleep in peace and rise in your light; through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. Amen (EvLW: Leader's Desk Edition, p. 739?).