

October 23, 2020

Plagues, Pandemics and Promises

We all have hoped and prayed that by now the numbers of people infected by the coronavirus would be down. We have dreamed of the possibility of a vaccine. As reality settles in, we must come to terms with living with COVID-19 for the long haul. We use words like “unprecedented” and “novel” when talking about the disease, but there have been other moments in our known history that have been just as devastating.

In a recent article, “Christians’ Responses to Plagues: A Glimpse at the History,” author Catherine Gunsalus González reminds us of the Great Plague of the fourteenth century: “The century began with a strange climate change we now call the ‘the Little Ice Age.’ Harvests failed because of freezes, too much rain, crops rotting in the fields, and the result was famine and malnutrition for more than a generation. . . . Then came bubonic bacterium from the rat . . . the plague killed more than twenty-five million people in Europe, about one-third of the population.”

González goes on to write about the Spanish flu, the polio epidemic and HIV-AIDS and makes some interesting observations: Humans have a tendency to want to find guilty parties to blame, and the church has responded with either compassion or condemnation (like the initial AIDS response). González writes that the ancient church believed that the health of the congregation and society was part of its ministry and provided structure to carry it out.

Sometimes the church has reflected the prejudices of society, but other times the church has been a part of the solution. Early hospitals were after all started by faith communities. As faithful people, we make a promise—a covenant—to God and each other to care for each other. And so we do what we can. Plymouth Church makes our parking lot available for COVID-19 testing. We offer flu shot clinics to our Food Shelf guests. As the pandemic wears on and wears us down, let us reach out to each other and provide a listening ear, a delivered meal and a prayer for good health.

Blessings!

Paula