

Dear Friends in Christ,

Fear is an important human instinct. Fear of some things comes naturally. Fear of other things must be taught. Some fear is good because it causes us to be careful and to avoid unnecessary risks. But sometimes fear becomes overwhelming and makes it difficult for us to function and to live life fully and freely.

I've read that the number one fear among Americans is speaking in public. The number two fear is death. That means, of course, that at funerals a good number of people would rather be in the casket than behind the podium speaking to the congregation.

We are bombarded with warnings about all kinds of dangers – threats from what we eat, from health risks, from economic instability, from political chaos, from climate change, and so on. Our news media uses fear to sell the news. Most of our news coverage is speculation about how bad our circumstances could potentially become. As many have noted, most of what we worry about never happens, and yet we suffer the stress of worrying about it anyway.

Our culture so bombards us with these threats that we lose all perspective. We drive thoughtlessly as if car accidents never happen while we obsess about things that have far less chance of happening.

As Christians, Jesus has called us to live free of fear – not recklessly, but boldly. There is no way to eliminate all risk from life. And that is okay, because we know that our future is in God's hands. God doesn't promise to protect us from every threat, but God promises to care for us in every time of trouble.

I've heard people say that they will refuse the COVID vaccine because it is not 100 % safe. Nothing in this life is 100 % safe. But the risks are so minimal that driving a car is far more dangerous. And as I have already noted in other places, we get a vaccination not just to protect ourselves but to participate in the protection of others in our society.

Unfortunately, the great majority of Americans no longer think about doing what is in the best interest of the community. We only think about ourselves as consumers and what is in our own narrow self-interest. So people say to themselves, "If I don't think I need a vaccination, I won't get it." There is no thought to what is in the best interest of our community and our nation. As President Kennedy famously said, "Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country."

It goes the same way in the Church. Like going to the store, members come to worship only when they think they need it. But what about what is in the best interest of the community? Do we come to worship for what we can get out of it or for how we can contribute to the encouragement and support of others? Your participation in worship, in Bible studies, and in fellowship events is not about what it does for you. It is about what your witness does for others. Ask not what your Church can do for you. Ask what you can do for your Church.

Yours in Christ, *Phil Nielsen*

