

Loving Our Neighbors amid a Pandemic

Marvin Olasky, *World Radio*, Mar. 16, 2020

NICK EICHER, HOST: Today is Monday, March 16th. Good morning! This is *The World and Everything in It* from listener-supported WORLD Radio. I'm Nick Eicher.

MARY REICHARD, HOST: And I'm Mary Reichard. Here's WORLD Editor in Chief Marvin Olasky with some thoughts from a theological giant of the 16th century who had to grapple with a deadly plague.

MARVIN OLASKY, EDITOR IN CHIEF: It takes a Texas two-step to fight poverty. Step one: Be generous. Step two: Be discerning.

It takes the same kind of Texas two-step to fight the coronavirus: Step one: Love your neighbor. Step two. Don't be foolhardy.

Such an understanding is nothing new. Ten years after Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the Wittenburg door, a plague ravaged Germany.

Pastor Johann Hess asked Luther for advice. Luther responded with a tract titled, *Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague*.

Luther's step one was to follow Christ's statement, "As much as you did to one of the least, you did to me" (Matthew 25:40). Luther continued: "If you wish to serve Christ and to wait on Him, very well, you have your sick neighbor well at hand."

Luther knew Satan would tempt us to flee. He said "the devil wants us to disregard God's command in our dealings with our neighbor." He called that—"sin of the left hand."

Luther then said, "Others sin on the right hand. They are much too rash and reckless, tempting God and disregarding everything which might counteract death and the plague. ... They do not avoid persons and places infected by the plague, but lightheartedly make sport of it and wish to prove how independent they are."

Luther said when people fail to protect themselves from the plague, they risk infecting and poisoning others who might have remained alive.

Luther was blunt: "He is thus responsible before God for his neighbor's death and is a murderer many times over. My dear friends, that is no good. ... Shun persons and places wherever your neighbor does not need your presence."

Now back to the coronavirus: We still don't know how far and fast it will spread. We don't know how lethal it will be, but we need to take precautions. We should carry on with necessary personal and public conduct but avoid the unessential.

We should postpone pleasure trips and cancel big public gatherings.

Luther said pastors "must admonish people to attend church and listen to the sermon so that they learn through God's word how to live and how to die."

But what if people can listen to the sermon via Skype or Zoom or podcast? Christians everywhere need to think that through prayerfully.

Let's conclude with one way Luther talked back to Satan: "If Christ shed his blood and died for me, why should I not expose myself to some small dangers for his sake and disregard this feeble plague? If you can terrorize, Christ can strengthen me. If you can kill, Christ can give life. If you have poison in your fangs, Christ has far greater medicine. ... Get away, devil. Here is Christ and here am I, his servant in this work. Let Christ prevail! Amen."

I'm Marvin Olasky.