

When Fear Turns to Anger

Rise & Shine, March 15th

1 John 4:18

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love.

Questions:

1. How can we balance the need to take seriously a public health crisis such as COVID-19 with the equally valid need to maintain calm and avoid unnecessary public panic and/or racial bias?
2. Where is the boundary between rational fear and precautions taken to avert a potentially fatal infection, and an emotional response rooted in prejudice and fear? Have you seen this boundary being crossed?
3. What is the responsibility of Christians to reduce the spread of disinformation and hate-based fearmongering in social media?

In the News

Discrimination Against Ethnic Asians on the Rise Since Coronavirus Outbreak

Symptoms of COVID-19 (Coronavirus) include fever, cough and breathing difficulties, which can lead to pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), kidney failure and death. But many ethnic Asians are just as concerned about the rise in verbal and physical attacks against members of their community since the COVID-19 outbreak.

"Since the coronavirus has hit the news, the level of racism and prejudice aimed at Asians and Asian-Americans has increased alarmingly," according to hospital chaplain Joon S. Park, a Korean-American. "Asians are being dehumanized by being called unclean and other derogatory terms, both online and in public encounters."

Chinese and other Asians have been demonized throughout much of human history, according to Chinese-Australian DJ Jex Wang, who wrote: "Stereotypes of Asians as submissive and nonaggressive make them a target that people think they can make fun of and laugh at. I've seen posts saying

Chinese people are dirty, disgusting, uneducated, we 'deserved' the virus because of our 'weird' food habits." After posting about the coronavirus on Instagram, she received a flood of hateful messages such as "China needs to be cancelled. Period."

The idea that Chinese and other Asians are disease carriers dates back at least to the 19th century, when many viewed Asia, aka the "yellow peril" or "the sick man of Asia," with suspicion, according to Erika Lee, University of Minnesota professor of history and Asian American studies.

To eliminate competition in the labor force, white labor unions claimed, without scientific evidence, that Chinese immigrants brought especially virulent strains of diseases into the United States. An 1878 headline of the *Medico-Literary Journal of San Francisco* proclaimed that "Chinese Women Are Infusing a Poison into the Anglo-Saxon Blood." In the late 1800s, a top Louisiana health official falsely reported that Chinese laundrymen were spreading leprosy by spitting on their customers' laundry. In 1882, all ethnically Chinese workers were banned from entry into the country through the Chinese Exclusion Act, based on news reports that the Asian rat was the source of bubonic plague. From state-sanctioned discrimination, it was a short step to the dehumanizing depiction of ethnically Chinese people as rats.

Backlash against ethnic Asians takes many forms, from the circulation of rumors that all children of Asian descent have the coronavirus and should be quarantined, to a now-deleted post on the University of California, Berkeley, health services center Instagram account that named xenophobia toward Asians as a "normal reaction" to the coronavirus threat. Angie Chen, a recent alum of the university, tweeted: "This just in from the number one public university in the world: It's okay to be xenophobic as long as you also feel sort of guilty about it."

A Thai-American named Jiraprapasuke was targeted on the Los Angeles subway by a man who ranted for about 10 minutes, "Every disease has ever came [sic] from China ... because they're [expletive] disgusting." Katherine Lu, 26, who lives in Los Angeles, rarely takes public transit, so she doesn't expect to experience that form of backlash. But she said, "If ... trains were essential to my day-to-day life, I would worry that people were worried about sharing the same airspace as me, just based on my face. The coronavirus is an opportunity for them to safely express their racist thoughts in a way that can be excused."

Another incident saw two men of Hmong ethnicity refused accommodations in two different Indiana hotels because they appeared Chinese.

Stigmatizing Chinese people due to the coronavirus outbreak is happening around the world as well. Businesses in Hong Kong, South Korea and Vietnam have posted signs indicating that Chinese customers are unwelcome. A much-viewed *YouTube* video in South Korea claims that a biochemical weapons facility in China leaked the coronavirus. In Japan, some people have used the hashtag *#ChineseDon'tComeToJapan* while others have labeled Chinese tourists as "bioterrorists" on Twitter. Online petitions in Malaysia and other nations, asking that Chinese nationals be forbidden entry at their borders, have garnered hundreds of thousands of signatures. The Australian newspaper, *The Herald Sun*, caused outrage when it published an image of a red mask with the caption "China Virus Panda-monium."

In Europe, *Le Courrier Picard*, a French regional newspaper, carried a front-page headline warning of a "Yellow Alert." A Vietnamese woman told another French newspaper, *Le Monde*, that a driver shouted "Keep your virus, dirty Chinese!" and "You are not welcome in France" at her as he sped away. In Leicestershire, UK, two students, presumed erroneously to be Chinese, were pelted with eggs. While many people in Asian countries are accustomed to wearing face masks to protect against pollution and infection, immigrants to the United Kingdom and elsewhere say the masks make them a target for verbal or physical attacks.

The York Region school board in a Toronto suburb with many Asian residents released this statement recently: "We have to be cautious that this not be seen as a Chinese virus. At times such as this, we must come together as Canadians and avoid any hint of xenophobia, which in this case can victimize our East Asian Chinese community."

In the United States, Dr. Nancy Messonnier, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's immunization and respiratory diseases program, warned against ethnic profiling. "Do not assume that if someone is of Asian descent, they have coronavirus," she said.

Many Chinese are using the online hashtag *#JeNeSuisPasUnVirus* -- French for "I am not a virus" -- to make that very point.

2 Corinthians 4:16-17

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison...

Proverbs 29:11

*A fool gives full vent to his spirit,
but a wise man quietly holds it back.*

Proverbs 15:1

*A soft answer turns away wrath,
but a harsh word stirs up anger.*

Prayer for a Pandemic

May we who are merely inconvenienced
Remember those whose lives are at stake.
May we who have no risk factors
Remember those most vulnerable.
May we who have the luxury of working from home
Remember those who must choose between preserving their health or making rent.
May we who have the flexibility to care for our children when their schools close
Remember those who have no options.
May we who have to cancel our trips
Remember those that have no place to go.
May we who are losing our margin money in the tumult of the economic market
Remember those who have no margin at all.
May we who settle in for a quarantine at home
Remember those who have no home.
During this time when we cannot physically wrap our arms around each other,
Let us yet find ways to be the loving embrace of God to our neighbors.
Amen.