

365: April 19: No Other Way (Come Follow Me/House Church Book of Mormon Week 14)

Reading: Mosiah 1-3

Outline

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Hymn: Jesus, Once of Humble Birth

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- Human nature and divine nature (My favorite topic!!!)
- Damnation
- Exclusivity
- Interconnection (God who lends you breath)
- Devotion (Mary Oliver Summer Day)
- Conclusion

Covid Check in: Recommend following my friend James Carroll, who provides substantial, detailed daily updates.

<https://www.facebook.com/jlcarroll/posts/10159565236759018>

COVID-19 Daily Update, Herd Immunity, % Infected and R

Today let's talk about herd immunity, the % of the population that we would expect to get COVID-19 with and without social distancing.

There is a sense that we either do one or the other, that we rely on herd immunity, or we rely on social distancing. If we rely on herd immunity, then most everyone will need to get the disease, and if we rely on social distancing, then herd immunity plays no role whatsoever. But neither are true. I have been guilty of the latter mistake myself. What actually happens is that the number of people who are immune adds to the effect of social distancing, lowering the R value (the number of people each infected person tends to infect). The and R value of a disease predicts the % of the population that has to be infected before herd immunity reaches its tipping point.

Defining terms: R_0 is the number of new people infected by a given infected person on average without any social mitigations, and in a fully susceptible population. This is a function of how the disease spreads. We will call the R value with some social distancing in a fully susceptible population R_S (the socially distanced R). And then, R is the actual R value with social distancing, and with a fraction of the population that are immune.

When the total R is above 1, the disease grows exponentially, exploding at a remarkable rate, infecting massive amounts of people in a shockingly short timeframe. When the R is below 1, the disease shrinks exponentially... ironically fulfilling the Trump prediction of “magically” vanishing in a remarkably short time.

But the R value also predicts what % of the population will need to get the disease before it stops growing exponentially.

Let's give a simple example. If the R value is 2, then each infected person infects 2 others, doubling each generation. And the doubling rate will depend on how quickly those infections happen on average. BUT, if 50% of the population have already had the disease and are immune, then on average 1 of the 2 people that each infected person exposes... is immune, and the disease is at a tipping point. If anything over 50% are infected, the disease will begin to shrink exponentially.

If the R value is 3, then the tipping point is around 66.7%. So in this case around 66.7% of the population need to be immune before the disease begins to shrink exponentially.

Something more than the tipping point will usually end up being infected. But I think that we can assume it won't be a LOT more. Exponentially shrinking functions are just as shocking in how quickly they change as are exponentially growing functions. So we wouldn't expect a lot more than this tipping point to end up infected.

As a further example, the flu has an R0 value of about 1.3, so we would predict that herd immunity would kick in at a tipping point around 23.1%. But the CDC estimates that, on average, about 8% of the U.S. population gets sick with the flu each season. As I understand this, the lower number actually infected each season is because of vaccination, and because each season we already have some immunity to different flu strains from previous seasons.

COVID-19 Worst Case Scenario:

Where does Herd Immunity begin for COVID-19? With no social mitigation or social distancing, we think that the R0 value of COVID-19 is somewhere between 2-3. That means we should expect between 50% - 66.7% of the population to be infected before we reach the “tipping point” where the disease goes away on its own. That is a LOWER estimate than my original estimate of 75%, and it would cause me to down-grade my initial estimate of how many dead we would expect from COVID-19 without mitigation efforts.

This means that without any social distancing efforts, and with a population size in the US of 328.2 Million, we would expect somewhere between 165 Million and 219 Million people in the US will catch the disease before reaching a “tipping point”, and then something only slightly more than that would end up catching the disease before it goes away on its own.

With an estimated mortality rate of 1.7% (see yesterday's post for more on that), we would therefore expect between 2.7 million and 3.7 million deaths. But there is also uncertainty on the

true Infection Mortality Rate. If we assume a range between 0.5% at the low end (this is Iceland's unrealistically low mortality rate), to 4% at the high end (which is the worst case of what can happen when hospitals are over-run), then the range of deaths (without social distancing) is 821 thousand at the low end, to 8.8 million at the high end.

But this is the worst case scenario, without any social distancing.

What Happens With Imperfect Social Distancing?

Many people (myself included) have assumed that to prevent this "worst case" scenario, we must achieve an R value below 1 with social distancing. However, what happens if we can't do that? This is an essential question, because it has bearing on what happens when we try to reopen the economy. Remember, social distancing is NOT an "either or" proposition. It is possible to reopen many businesses, continue to ban large gatherings, and implement face coverings, wash your hands, stay home if sick, and let as many people as possible work from home as possible, etc... all allowing a basically open economy, without actually returning to the R0 value. R0 is between 2 and 3. How much lower would that be with these measures in place? We don't know, but the achieved RS value would determine what percent of the population that eventually becomes infected.

So what does that look like?

Let's ASSUME that we flatten the curve so systems aren't over-run, then we gradually re-open, but keep some mild social distancing in place for the next year until there is a vaccine... and let's assume that by using this mild social distancing we can achieve an RS of between 1.1 and 1.5. Now, that's over 1, so... we might assume that we end up back in the worst case scenario... but we don't. With an RS of 1.1-1.5, the "tipping point" for herd immunity moves substantially. Now the expected deaths is somewhere between 149 Thousand and 4.4 Million.

By far the largest unknown driving the deaths in that scenario is the death rate. If it's 0.5%, then there are between 149 thousand and 547 thousand deaths. If the mortality rate is 4%, then there are between 1.2 million - 4.4 million deaths.

I think this is key. Even those claiming the un-realistically low mortality rate of 0.5%, are talking about hundreds of thousands of deaths. With no social distancing at all, 821 thousand - 1.1 million deaths, and with mild social distancing 149 thousand - 547 thousand deaths.

Things are somewhat better if you can drop the RS to 1.025-1.075, and we end up with between 40 thousand, and 916 thousand deaths.

Conclusion:

Herd immunity can augment social distancing, but if the achieved RS value isn't either below 1, or at least very close to it, then the numbers dead are still very large.

Good reminder: Disruption is the most reliable catalyst for change.

House Church

Hymn: Jesus, Once of Humble Birth (gets at the powerful contrasts Benjamin emphasizes)

Prayer: Noticed that I pray along with the theme of the lesson. It's a powerful practice.

Sacrament: Reflect on our human nature and shortcomings, love and compassion, resolve to do better this week

Lesson: Of God and Humans

- Condescension of God
- Human nature and divine nature (My favorite topic!!!)
- Serving humans and serving God
- Damnation
- Exclusivity
- Interconnection (God who lends you breath)
- Devotion (Mary Oliver Summer Day)
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Condescension of God: Struck by power of contrast and parallelism, Mosiah 3:5-10

5 For behold, the time cometh, and is not far distant, that with power, the Lord Omnipotent who reigneth, who was, and is from all eternity to all eternity, shall come down from heaven among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay, and shall go forth amongst men, working mighty miracles, such as healing the sick, raising the dead, causing the lame to walk, the blind to receive their sight, and the deaf to hear, and curing all manner of diseases.

6 And he shall cast out devils, or the evil spirits which dwell in the hearts of the children of men.

7 And lo, he shall suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death; for behold, blood cometh from every pore, so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people.

8 And he shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning; and his mother shall be called Mary.

9 And lo, he cometh unto his own, that salvation might come unto the children of men even through faith on his name; and even after all this they shall consider him a man, and say that he hath a devil, and shall scourge him, and shall crucify him.

10 And he shall rise the third day from the dead; and behold, he standeth to judge the world; and behold, all these things are done that a righteous judgment might come upon the children of men.

(Such a powerful teaching, that the God of the universe incarnated into a fragile, vulnerable, fallible baby human being)

Core of Christianity: God became human so humans can become godly/god (distinctive emphasis in LDS belief)

Human nature:

So now from the question of God to the question of us. My greatest interest is the intersection of religion and human nature (so very pertinent to these chapters!)

What does it mean that “the natural human is an enemy to God” (Mosiah 3:19) One of most well known and I think misunderstood scriptures. The natural human is a stranger to God, or more accurately, each of us have a mess of inclinations, tendencies, and cultural conditioning that invites us both toward and away from God. But for us to be reborn (reprogrammed, we could say

I like thinking of our brain as hard drives, our cultural conditioning as our operating system, and what we choose to learn and do as programs we install.

Lizard brain, mouse brain, monkey brain, human brain

Lizard brain: survival

Mouse brain: comfort

Monkey brain: relationships

Human brain: logical, strategic thinking and problem solving

Hierarchy of needs: we can't think like a human

Summary of this verse: our natural way of being is in opposition to the nature of God, and needs to be trained and transformed. We become what we practice. We are always training ourselves and others. We need to turn from toddlers to saints. Toddlers want to get what they want pretty much at any cost, only their feelings and needs matter, if they don't get it they will throw a temper tantrum, they can't delay their gratification, etc.

My favorite way of thinking about this is we are Small. Selfish. Social.

Small. Limited. Mostly not evil, just overwhelmed.

Selfish. Our own perceptions literally imprison us. Our own feelings and thoughts and views are the only way we can access the world and reality, the human experience.

Social. This is the secret and path to redemption! Treating people as people, treating others as real as ourselves, is how we become children of God, how we become like God. We learn that

others matter, that others have different experiences and perspectives than we do. We learn to take those differences seriously. We learn to love and cooperate.

Serving Humans and Serving God

Mosiah 2:17-19: And behold, I tell you these things that ye may learn wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God.

Behold, ye have called me your king; and if I, whom ye call your king, do labor to serve you, then ought not ye to labor to serve one another?

19 And behold also, if I, whom ye call your king, who has spent his days in your service, and yet has been in the service of God, do merit any thanks from you, O how you ought to thank your heavenly King!

What principles are in these verses?

Live with gratitude. Work and serve with a feeling of gratitude rather than entitlement or resistance (Comment on how backwards society is right now, debt driven gratification, consumerism, etc. We don't have trained into us principle of law of harvest, work then reap reward)

Here is the target: Get to the point where serving God and serving each other is equally important, feels the same, same degree of motivation. I'll come back to this.

****Exclusivity and Damnation***

I have to admit I was troubled returning to these chapters, as beautiful as I have found them to be during previous readings. The difference is my experience as an Interfaith Chaplain. Let's talk about damnation and exclusivity for a moment. For both of these I'm going to apply my usual functionalist, order of operations approach.

Damnation: I actually really appreciate the passages on damnation in these chapters. In fact, I think Mosiah 2:37-38 is one of the most helpful explanations of hell and damnation:

I say unto you, that the [one] that doeth this, the same cometh out in open rebellion against God; therefore he listeth to obey the evil spirit, and becometh an enemy to all righteousness; therefore, the Lord has no place in him, for he dwelleth not in unholy temples.

38 Therefore if that [one] repenteth not, and remaineth and dieth an enemy to God, the demands of divine justice do awaken his immortal soul to a lively sense of his own guilt, which doth cause him to shrink from the presence of the Lord, and doth fill his breast with guilt, and pain, and anguish, which is like an unquenchable fire, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever.

(go line by line) This clearly clarifies what 'burning in hell' means... not literal eternal burning (a horrific thought), but a natural consequence of waking up to the harm we have caused to ourselves, how out of alignment we have become. I know some of my greatest pain has been realizing I have hurt others, often despite my best efforts... being forced to become fully awake and sensitive and not being able to do anything about it, realizing it is too late.. This would be a lively pain indeed. I should talk to prisoners more about this.

So how could we talk about damnation: I find it most helpful to talk about it as an orientation, and alignment, the way we are faced and headed in life. One of my favorite teachings is the "path of salvation" and "path of damnation", and the emphasis that this life is not only part of eternity, but the most urgent stage of eternity. Every day, every moment, we are living salvation and damnation to different degrees. I understand salvation (becoming like our Heavenly Parents) as maximizing Love, Joy, Peace, Freedom, and Growth. Damnation is avoiding these, losing ourselves to hate and avoidance, misery, anxiety, bondage, and stagnation.

I also think the gospel and temple teach progression between the kingdoms, as I've explained before. The most urgent and important target/focus is how we are progressing toward salvation NOW. In a very real way, how we are *experiencing* salvation and damnation now.

The first urgent step, as the angel told Benjamin, is to AWAKE. I feel so intensely it hurts pretty much constantly, including pain over mistakes I have made. Taking accountability and accepting and applying feedback is a superpower of mine (I was talking to my prison Lt. about this just yesterday). It HURTS but it is efficient and worth it. Wake up. Let yourself see your faults, lean into the pain, and this will trigger growth and transformation.

Exclusivity: This is a powerful sermon, and has been one of my favorite. But this time I read it with the eyes of an Interfaith Chaplain (I had a lovely talk this week with the chair of the Salt Lake Interfaith Roundtable about meeting prisoners' religious needs). Some of the teachings in these chapters are only beautiful and uplifting if you already believe in them. You may ask what other option there is, and it's precisely the one that I stress again and again. I deeply believe there is a win-win approach to religion, that uplifts and brings us closer to God *no matter what we believe*. That's what I'm dedicating my life to.

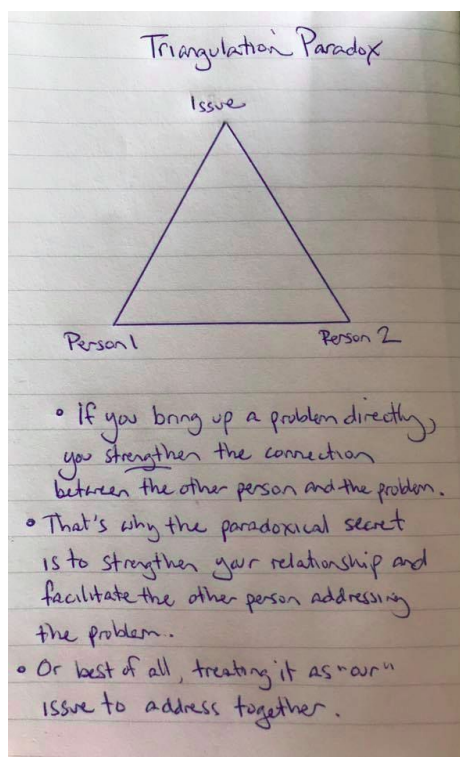
The key question: Can we worship, follow, and come to Christ without knowing we are doing so? (I think the answer is clear)

We need to take seriously the horrors that have been committed in the name of Christian exclusivity, "bringing the gospel to the benighted masses" (I'm listening to the book "The Brothers" right now, about the Dulles brothers who were Secretary of State and CIA director respectively and the influence of Christianity is scary).

We can live the gospel in such a way that our beliefs and practices lead us toward good and growth. I think the way we approach order of operations when it comes to exclusivity or the path to salvation is one of the most urgent.

So what's a healthy way to look at exclusivity? Well, I think it's connected to human nature, another theme of these chapters. Benjamin stresses that Jesus is the only way, that every person on the earth will learn about Jesus, and everyone who does not accept Jesus will be damned. True or not, focusing first and foremost on that point can backfire. Yes, you can get some fear-based conversion, but that's not the best way to go. Most seriously, prioritizing exclusivity encourages some of the most harmful consequences of religion. When we are convinced we are right, we often aren't very good, because we feel that our rightness justifies any approach, ends justify the means. Again, we need to take seriously the harm that has been done in the name of Christianity, then do better.

One of the most interesting principles I learned in chaplain training is the principle of triangulation:



So if you focus on how everyone who does not accept Christ will be damned, you are actually increasing resistance and decreasing effectiveness.

I propose a different path:

- 1) Meet and love people where they are

- 2) Learn about and respect their beliefs
- 3) Teach them the principles of the gospel
- 4) Help them live the principles of the gospel
- 5) They will come closer to God and become like God in the way that works best for them.

Is it possible that Jesus will embrace those who never knew him, bless them for living the gospel, and in that moment they will recognize him? That's what the scriptures and gospel teach quite clearly.

Interconnection:

Why is dust better than humans? Because it obeys god.

Helaman 12:7-8: O how great is the nothingness of the children of men; yea, even they are less than the dust of the earth. For behold, the dust of the earth moveth hither and thither, to the dividing asunder, at the command of our great and everlasting God.

I LOVE these verses about God sustaining us from moment to moment, Mosiah 2:20-21.

I say unto you, my brethren, that if you should render all the thanks and praise which your whole soul has power to possess, to that God who has created you, and has kept and preserved you, and has caused that ye should rejoice, and has granted that ye should live in peace one with another—

I say unto you that if ye should serve him who has created you from the beginning, and is preserving you from day to day, by lending you breath, that ye may live and move and do according to your own will, and even supporting you from one moment to another—I say, if ye should serve him with all your whole souls yet ye would be unprofitable servants.

One of my favorite terms is Biosphere. Life only thrives because of how the interconnected web functions. We are interdependent at every level (earth without humans would thrive; earth without insects would shut down very quickly). We are all interconnected and interdependent. This period is called the “anthropocene” because human activity is endangering this interconnected web of life

Link from the Smithsonian:

<http://humanorigins.si.edu/research/age-humans-evolutionary-perspectives-anthropocene>

One blessing of this pandemic is that we are feeling how interconnected we are. We have to work together (I think the internet has changed the world more than almost anything else because we can see and talk to each other, experience each other's perspectives like never before)

This is our target: Serve God. Serve fellow humans. Serve life. It is all the same, all One.

Devotion: (the last two lines have helped me practice compassion toward myself and others.
This question is up to each of us to answer. No one else can do it for us)

“Summer Day”, by Mary Oliver

Who made the world?

Who made the swan, and the black bear?

Who made the grasshopper?

This grasshopper, I mean-

the one who has flung herself out of the grass,

the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,

who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down-

who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.

Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.

Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.

I don't know exactly what a prayer is.

I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down

into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,

how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,

which is what I have been doing all day.

Tell me, what else should I have done?

Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?

**Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?**