

The Wired Word

Student Handout

No Normal Thanksgiving This Year

Sunday, November 22, 2020 --- from 9:00-9:45am

Hybrid Class

In Person: First Floor Social Hall (Mask & Social Distancing Required)

or

Zoom: Meeting ID: 860 8980 7220 --- Passcode: 195152

Dear Class Member,

For people in many states this coming week, Covid-19 restrictions will be the spoiler of Thanksgiving. And even in states without significant restrictions, concerns about the virus itself hover in the background. Given that approval of at least two vaccines is imminent, we can look forward to next Thanksgiving -- Thanksgiving 2021 - with the hope of it being more "normal."

That gives us reason to think about the Bible's phrase "The days are coming when ..." or what we might call the Bible's "tomorrow factor." So that will be the topic of our next class.

How To Participate:

We are offering *The Wired Word* as a hybrid class. You can participate in person or via Zoom. *The Wired Word* will be from 9:00am-9:45am on Sunday mornings. For those meeting in person, we will be in the old social hall of the church building (located on the first floor). If participating in person, please come with a mask and follow the COVID-19 Safety Guidelines for Sunday School: <http://www.sprucc.org/news-a-events/news.html#COVID19Precautions>.

You can also participate in the Wired Word virtually by Zoom on your computer or smart device at:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86089807220?pwd=eStWa0ZZK0hOTVdwU0pjZlMrdk5ydz09>

or by telephone (land line or cell phone) by calling: 1-301-715-8592

Meeting ID: 860 8980 7220

Passcode: 195152

The Older Teen Class will be joining The Wired Word class for Nov 8, 15, & 22 (and returning to their normal class on Nov 29)

The Wired Word Class is cancelled for Nov 29 (Next Week)

All Sunday School Classes, including the Wired Word, are cancelled for Dec 27, & Jan 3

To subscribe or unsubscribe for the **free** weekly mailing of *The Wired Word* student handout, please contact the church office at Office@sprucc.org.



No 'Normal' Thanksgiving This Year, but Maybe in 2021

The Wired Word for the Week of November 22, 2020

In the News

Last week a second pharmaceutical company announced that its vaccine is showing great effectiveness against Covid-19 in testing. That company, Moderna, said its vaccine appears to be 94.5 percent effective, according to preliminary data from an ongoing study. A week before that, competitor Pfizer announced that its vaccine is showing a 90 percent effective rate in its clinical tests.

These announcements put both companies on track to seek permission from the FDA within weeks for emergency use of their vaccines in the United States.

While the likelihood of these vaccines being available soon has to be considered good news in the fight against the pandemic, they won't rescue this year's Thanksgiving gatherings from the kind of dampers many state governors and public health officials are recommending during this time when the virus is surging.

Because even asymptomatic people can spread the disease, many of those recommendations call for keeping holiday gatherings to 10 individuals or fewer and asking people not to travel. Some say it's best to limit attendance to members of your own household.

Obviously, the likelihood of an attendee carrying the virus into your gathering goes up significantly the more guests you have. For those wanting a localized risk assessment, there's a map developed by Georgia Tech researchers that allows you to zoom in on your area, choose the number of people you think will attend and learn the odds of at least one Covid-19 positive person being there, assuming those in attendance have the general probability of infection. See the map in the links list below.

Beyond this Thanksgiving, however, the vaccines offer hope of life eventually returning to "normal," but not as quickly as any of us would like.

"There is an end to this," said Dr. Anthony Fauci, head of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. But he and many other health officials say that in the meantime, it will require the public to continue wearing masks, maintaining distance from others, avoiding crowds and being willing to receive a vaccination against the virus.

"People shouldn't think of vaccines as the savior," said Dr. Paul Offit, director of the Vaccine Education Center at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and a professor of vaccinology at the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. "Vaccines are, along with hygienic measures, a way to get in control of this virus, but we need both."

"If you have a very, very highly effective vaccine and we convince most of the people in the country to take the vaccine, we could get back to a degree of normality maybe by the end of 2021," Fauci said.

By the end of 2021! We want normality sooner, but many projections say we need to be ready for a concerted effort over several more months.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[There May Be a Covid-19 Vaccine by the End of the Year, But 'Normality' May Not Come Until End of 2021. USA Today](#)

[Officials Issue a Blunt Message for Thanksgiving: Keep Your Gathering Small and Don't Travel. NBC News](#)

[2nd Virus Vaccine Shows Striking Success in US Tests. AP News](#)

[Covid-19 Event Risk Assessment Planning Tool. Georgia Tech](#)

Applying the News Story

Regarding this Thanksgiving -- and judging by what we hear from high-profile health officials -- it appears we're faced with the choice between risking our health and that of our family members or foregoing Thanksgiving gatherings altogether, and hoping for better choices when Thanksgiving 2021 comes around.

Does it strike you that there's something very biblical in those circumstances? Hope itself is a major theme in the scriptures; hope is a projection of our goals and desires into the future, trusting in God. Likewise, restoration is a biblical theme, which can include a return to normality or the way life was before the pandemic. Hope and restoration are the "tomorrow factor" in the Bible.

Tomorrow is the stuff of prophecy. "The days are coming when ..." proclaimed the prophets. Such prophecies were often uttered during dark and dismal days in Israel's history when not only the present but also the future looked bleak. But "tomorrow" was one way the prophets kept Israel's faith alive. In biblical terms, tomorrow -- the future, the time that has not yet arrived -- is the assurance that the present is never the end of the story. It proclaims that the darkness of today will not survive into tomorrow.

Tomorrow is one of the keys for understanding Christianity, too. We explain it something like this: When you embrace the way of Christ, you enter the kingdom of God, which is already here in some ways. But you also inherit the hope of the kingdom to come, where God's love and power will have full sway, where all wrongs will be righted and where there will be neither sorrow nor suffering anymore.

Thus hope and restoration -- the tomorrow factor -- are the topics of this discussion.

The Big Questions

1. For what are you thankful this year? What impact, if any, have the present circumstances, including not gathering for worship, had on your faith in God? Why? How does the Bible's "tomorrow factor" operate in your life today?
2. What to you is the most depressing thing for you about living through this pandemic? What, if anything, or who, if anyone, has helped you deal with any pandemic-related despair? What is the most hopeful thing about living through the pandemic?
3. What might be the first thing you will do when the "all clear" from the virus is given? What would a return to "normality" look like for you? Might there be a "new normal" for you? Why?
4. What accommodations have you had to make to continue on during the pandemic and which ones of those, if any, might you want to continue once the pandemic is behind us? Why?
5. How much of your hope for restoration of your pre-pandemic way of life is based on the availability of a vaccine? Explain.

Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Joel 2:24-26

The threshing floors shall be full of grain, the vats shall overflow with wine and oil. I will repay you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army, which I sent against you. You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, who has dealt wondrously with you. ... (For context, read 2:12-27.)

Joel prophesied to the people of Judah during a locust plague, where a massive swarm of the insects devoured every scrap of vegetation from the fields and orchards, leaving the populace with little, and setting them back "years" in terms of their agriculture. Joel called the people to repentance (vv. 12-14) and even gave them a model prayer to pray (v. 17).

He also projected for the people how God was going to respond to their prayers, some of which is quoted in the verses above -- abundant grain, wine and oil for starters, but beyond that God would "repay" the people for the "years" the locusts had taken from them. The Hebrew word translated into English as "repay" is *shālēm*, which is related to the more widely known *shālôm*, which means "peace." *Shālēm* includes that concept, but adds the ideas of "completeness," "fulfillment" and "perfection." When applied to its use in the verses above, *shālēm* denotes that forgiveness for the people's sin has been given -- in effect, God has paid off their unpaid obligation -- and wholeness is restored, which is a perfect state. "You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God," quoted above, describes that perfect state.

While the coronavirus plague is an unprecedented event in our lifetime and a tragedy for many, the idea that we have to wait until sometime in the future for the restoration of "normality" puts us in a predicament not unlike that of Joel and his fellow Judahites facing the tragic results of the locust plague. For them, there was great promise in God's response to their prayer; for us there is great promise in the vaccines we hope will soon be available. But just as the Judahites had to project these promises into the future, so do we with the promises of vaccine rescue. The Judahites' restoration wasn't going to happen overnight, and neither is ours.

But that's the nature of hope: It is always looking forward, and it's doing so in the conviction that our lives are in God's hands.

TWW team member Frank Ramirez comments on this text from Joel: "We are so used to thinking as individuals. The idea of having everything restored may not have been true for every individual but for the community, restoration is certain. There's no question that those who have lost family and friends to the virus will not have those people restored. Businesses may not reopen. Those whose response has been uncivil may not find their relationships restored -- at least not immediately.

"But our grandchildren may live in a better world. Business may get better. Family becomes dearer as do reunions. It's a lot like the clause in the commandment about honoring your father and your mother that your days may be long in the land God is giving you. We may individually care for our parents, but our lives personally may be short. However, the people who care for the most vulnerable are creating a sane and stable society, one that has security. That's the restoration we may hope for."

Questions: Why didn't God "repay" the people of Judah right away? Why doesn't he do that for us regarding restoration to normality? What is your response to Frank Ramirez's remarks?

Matthew 6:10

Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. (For context, read 6:5-15.)

This line from the Lord's Prayer might be called the ultimate in hope, where we project the restoration of all things into the future beyond time.

Restoration means returning something to a previous state or condition. In the biblical view, the kingdom of God is a restoration to the state where everyone lives as God intended, the state that is represented biblically by the Garden of Eden,

Questions: What does the kingdom of God mean to you? What sort of restoration of things important to you are you expecting when it comes? Is God's will to be found in the pandemic, or in our response to the pandemic, or not in the pandemic at all? Explain your reasoning.

John 1:20

... I am not the Messiah. (For context, read 1:19-28.)

John the Baptist made this statement when some priests and Levites, after hearing his preaching, quizzed him about his identity. He made clear he was not the long-expected Messiah, but was rather "the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'"

The fact that people thought John *might* be the Messiah, however, highlights the belief prevalent in the Judaism of that time, which started centuries before, that a savior was coming to restore Israel to independence and peace. The expectation of a Messiah was a hope projected into the future.

Questions: As the New Testament tells us, Jesus was the Messiah. But why, do you think, some of his contemporaries had difficulty accepting him as such?

What should we make of Dr. Paul Offit's remark that "People shouldn't think of vaccines as the savior"?

Zechariah 8:3-6

Thus says the LORD: I will return to Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem; Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts shall be called the holy mountain. ... Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of their great age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets. ... Even though it seems impossible to the remnant of this people in these days, should it also seem impossible to me, says the LORD of hosts? (For context, read 8:1-8.)

This is the Lord speaking through the prophet Zechariah to the "remnant," the Jews who had survived the Babylonian exile and had now returned to their homeland -- but only to find the cities destroyed, the temple gone, the fields uncultivated and other peoples, who did not welcome their return, living where their homes had once been.

To them God promised restoration where it would be safe for the elderly to "again sit in the streets of Jerusalem," streets "full of boys and girls playing ..." When would all this come to pass? It's not specified in the prophecy, and it wasn't going to happen quickly or without their hard work and cooperation, but Zechariah voiced the vision and the people had what the prophet described to look forward to.

Questions: Zechariah's prophecy might be described using the modern term "vision casting." What is the value of such visions when the fulfillment is likely to be a long way off? When has a vision kept you going despite difficulties? What motivation, if any, did a vision or dream provide you over a long haul?

For Further Discussion

1. Consider England during the dark days of World War II, especially early in the war when the country was ill prepared to fight. Night after night, Nazi warplanes bombed London. Many of London's children were sent to live with relatives out in the countryside, and people in the city lived with blackout conditions at night, sometimes running for air-raid shelters. And night after night, British flyers, seriously outgunned, took to the air to try and defend the country. Many did not return alive.

In the midst of all that, a song was written: "The White Cliffs of Dover." Listen to it [here](#) and discuss how tomorrow functions in the song.

2. Respond to this, heard in a sermon: "When Christians work at helping others, we can call that 'finding tomorrow.' That has a counterpart in Judaism called *tikkun olam*, a Hebrew phrase meaning 'repairing the world.' One part of the concept is focused on Jews themselves, with the idea that they should form their own community as a model for the world of how God wants people to live together. But the other part is outward-looking. It means they aren't responsible only for creating a model society among themselves but also have some responsibility for the whole society's welfare.

"*Tikkun olam* and 'finding tomorrow' aren't about good works or advocacy by themselves. Rather, they're about employing those things in balance with meeting people's spiritual needs. We cannot repair the world just by securing economic well-being and equal rights for everyone; we also need to assist people in finding God.

"The kingdom of God is the ultimate tomorrow. It's the goal of history and the reward of the faithful. Its coming is up to God. But between today and that tomorrow are the nearer tomorrows. We who follow Jesus have the duty to make sure that society's benefits are open for all for those tomorrows and that the path to spiritual fulfillment is well marked.

"And we shouldn't wait for tomorrow to get started. We can get there from here."

3. Reflect on this from TWW consultant James Gruetzner, and discuss the phrase "safety third." Emergency response personnel have long used the phrase "Safety Third" (as in "safety is the third consideration") in reference to their jobs. This phrase has become well known through Mike Rowe, host of the series *Dirty Jobs* and *Somebody's Gotta Do It*. It reflects the fact that nothing is perfectly safe, but people make trade-offs between the probability of costs (risks) and the probability of gain (benefits). A common example is driving a car: Most people consider the benefits of driving to a given destination to outweigh the risk of an auto accident. Safety is a major consideration, but it is not primary. If personal safety were the only consideration, no emergency medical personnel would go to help a person in a crashed vehicle on a busy highway -- much less ride in an ambulance to get there!

What, then, are first and second? Sometimes the terms "mission" and "heart" are used for the first and second considerations. "Mission" means that the task or operation must have a goal that is worthwhile. "Heart" refers to the attitude and internal joy a person gets -- and reflects the interplay between the desired goal (benefits) and the risks involved (safety).

The idea of Safety Third reflects how most people view the things they do in their lives. It also reflects how God dealt with us. Jesus did not consider his own safety as something to cling to, but instead chose death on a cross in order to achieve his mission of restoring our relationship with God. He was not disheartened, but carried on to the end -- to our benefit.

4. Discuss this: Regarding the choice between risking health at a Thanksgiving gathering and having no gathering at all, TWW consultant James Gruetzner, who works in the scientific community, says, "Really that is the choice every year, even though we generally haven't acknowledged it. Any gathering runs a definite risk of spreading infectious disease, and this novel coronavirus isn't any different. Its morbidity isn't much greater than other diseases, but we have now been made aware of -- or even made scared of -- its effects."

TWW team member Stan Purdum adds to this that since the Covid-19 restrictions have been put in place, he, who usually has one or two colds every year, has had none at all, which perhaps adds anecdotal confirmation to Gruetzner's comment that every gathering runs a risk of spreading infectious disease.

Responding to the News

This is a good time to be diligent in wearing a mask and maintaining a social distance of six feet. While the increased social distance benefits all concerned, whatever benefits coming from mask wearing mostly accrue to others, while the wearer puts up with the disadvantages. Thus mask wearing may be a sign of caring for others, and their mask wearing a sign of caring for us.

Prayer

Lord of yesterday, today and tomorrow, let our hopes for better circumstances ahead prod us to do what we can to help others get through today's difficulties. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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