

Social distancing and the gospel of love

Charlie Lehardy

We're keeping our distance. Restaurants are closed to customers who want to eat in. Social gatherings have been cancelled, including church Bible studies and worship services. All this enforced distancing hopes to slow the spread of an invisible and deadly virus.

In Jesus' day, certain contagious people were required to shout "unclean" as they encountered the public, which gave the healthy folks a chance to get out of the way. People scattered at their approach, but Jesus once again overturned the social conventions of his day by speaking lovingly to the diseased, touching them, and healing them.

In the famous parable of the good Samaritan, "good" men avoided a man who was beaten and left bleeding by the side of the road. They were practicing an uglier form of social distancing – let's-not-get-involvedism – but the Samaritan man, a member of a group that was normally shunned by others, reached out in love and took care of the bleeding man.

[1 John 4:18](#) says that "perfect love expels all fear," and in the next verse John reminds us that "we love each other because [God] first loved us." There is much to fear in life, but God's love compels us to overcome fear with love.

As Christians, we're commanded to love our neighbors. In this time of great fear, let's not forget that. We can (and should) take precautions against spreading the coronavirus, but we must also keep reaching out in fearless love to those we meet every day, and especially to those who are now isolated and afraid.

This crisis is tempting us to fear our neighbors and to keep our distance from anyone or anything that might put us at risk. As we ask God to help us with our fears, let's look around us for friends and neighbors that we can call or email to say, how are you? Is there anything I can do to help?

And let's offer to pray for those who are afraid, who are out of work and running out of money, or who have loved ones who are sick. We are the church. We are Jesus' ambassadors. How can we love as Jesus might love in this dangerous and uncertain time?