

*Church, you are making a sensible and godly response to the COVID-19 crisis. Thank you! Keep it up!*

You are praying without ceasing, prioritizing faith over fear, “social distancing,” and helping one another. I’ll share some of the things I know Burnt Hickory folks are doing as godly first responders. If you are doing (or seeing) things that impress you, please let me know at [rubel.s@burnthickory.org](mailto:rubel.s@burnthickory.org).

I look forward to being with you Sunday for worship online. We are, of course, having no assemblies at the church building until further notice. That will be weeks away now, and there is no point in giving a “target date” for resuming normal activities. Neighbor churches, schools, many businesses, athletic contests – everyone is involved and all our lives are going to be disrupted for an indefinite period of time.

People you and I know are (or will be) sick with this virus. There will be more deaths. In the face of all this, fear is not a sin; it is an involuntary emotion. When you hear a loud bump in the night, the flush of fear you feel is natural. *Fear that is sinful is fear we foster, embrace, and let take over our lives.*

When Jesus says, “Fear not! – and that happens pretty often in the Gospels – he is telling people to push back against their fears by putting their trust in him. That is the challenge of this scary time for us. Healthy fear causes you to take reasonable and sane precautions; unhealthy fear spoils our witness for Christ by moving us to anger, alcohol and drugs, and other foolish behaviors. I’ll talk about this more on Sunday. (By the way, if you can’t be with us “live” at gam, our online worship session will be recorded and posted within about an hour.)

Finally for now, here is a blurb from the online magazine *The Gospel Coalition*. I used it to close our worship time last week, and some of you wanted a copy of it to read and share. So here it is. Isn’t it interesting that fear is a threat to every generation – presenting itself in a variety of forms? C.S. Lewis wrote this some 72 years ago. As you read, just substitute coronavirus for atomic bomb!

*In one way we think a great deal too much of the atomic bomb. “How are we to live in an atomic age?” I am tempted to reply: “Why, as you would have lived in the sixteenth century when the plague visited London almost every year, or as you would have lived in a Viking age when raiders from Scandinavia might land and cut your throat any night; or indeed, as you are already living in an age of cancer, an age of syphilis, an age of paralysis, an age of air raids, an age of railway accidents, an age of motor accidents.”*

*In other words, do not let us begin by exaggerating the novelty of our situation. Believe me, dear sir or madam, you and all whom you love were already sentenced to death before the atomic bomb was invented: and quite a high percentage of us were going to die in unpleasant ways. We had, indeed, one very great advantage over our ancestors—anaesthetics; but we have that still. It is perfectly ridiculous to go about whimpering and drawing long faces because the scientists have added one more chance of painful and premature death to a world which already bristled with such chances and in which death itself was not a chance at all, but a certainty.*

*This is the first point to be made: and the first action to be taken is to pull ourselves together. If we are all going to be destroyed by an atomic bomb, let that bomb when it comes find us doing sensible and human things—praying, working, teaching, reading, listening to music, bathing the children, playing tennis, chatting to our friends over a pint and a game of darts—not huddled together like frightened sheep and thinking about bombs. They may break our bodies (a microbe can do that) but they need not dominate our minds.*

— “On Living in an Atomic Age” (1948) in  
*Present Concerns: Journalistic Essays*