

One of the fascinating dynamics about this time we are going through, is the number of other issues that are gaining more attention during the covid pandemic. There are a number of articles about other “pandemics” that are occurring at the same time as Covid 19. Economic inequality, racism, obesity, health care systems, political leadership, depression, drug use, suicides, and so on.

Before Trump was elected president in 2016, I said, “the best we can hope for if he gets elected and the Republicans control Congress is: The hidden, denied and deep problems in American will be exposed.” I never dreamed so much would be so visible and hard to paper over.

A major “discovery” is who is catching and dying in greater numbers. For example, Native Americans, Latinos, and African-Americans are dying at much higher rates than white people - and we don’t know the half of it because various governments have not released any racial data about the virus; we don’t know if they’re even collecting it. Here in Canada I haven’t heard any statistics about Indigenous people as well as those who are poorer – but I think we can assume it’s more equal than in many countries around the world.

So I hope you read this article about another “pandemic” that is occurring right now – despite the multiple ways and tools we have to communicate today.

A Tale of Two Pandemics (And Being Compassionate About Both)

By **Eric Geiger** October 6, 2020

The definition of a pandemic, according to the dictionary, is a “disease that occurs over a wide geographic area.” CoVid clearly meets that definition as the virus has spread across the globe, and over 200,000 people in the US have died. And as we all have recognized, CoVid is not the only struggle that people we love and serve are wrestling with, not the only disease that is bringing chaos and pain into our world. The dictionary defines disease as a “condition of the living animal or plant body or of one of its parts that impairs normal functioning and is typically manifested by distinguishing signs and symptoms.” Alcohol and substance abuse are rising as people search for ways to numb their pain. **Mental health** is deteriorating as factors that help ensure we are mentally healthy have been compromised such as meaningful work, community, and exercise. Calls to suicide hotlines have skyrocketed. People have lost their jobs and their businesses, the ability to provide for themselves and their families. Kids and teenagers have had hopes and dreams stripped from them.

While technically we may be living through one pandemic *and* the implications of that pandemic, one could make the case that we are living through two pandemics. Instead of using the term a “second pandemic,” some speak of “the other side of the pandemic” or “the implications of the pandemic.” Whatever “it” is called, it is real.

Before we knew of **CoVid**, Vivek Murthy, former Surgeon General of the United States, articulated that **loneliness is the biggest health problem facing our country**. About his work, Murthy stated: “I came to a deeper appreciation for the science behind loneliness which tells us that loneliness and weak

social connections are associated with a reduction in lifespan similar to that caused by smoking 15 cigarettes a day and even greater than that associated with obesity.”

The former Surgeon General called loneliness the biggest health problem in our country, and CoVid has multiplied loneliness.

Both pandemics (or both sides of the pandemic) are driving the stories we hear. Just last weekend between church services, I talked to one gentleman in our church who lost both his parents, 87 years old, to CoVid. I also heard of people who have traded in years of their sobriety for some substance to numb their pain in the midst of the isolation. I have heard from parents whose kids have socially regressed and who are struggling to be separate from them. Yes the stats about both pandemics are real, but so are the stories.

Understanding that we are living through two pandemics helps us be compassionate and sensitive to others.

If, for example, you are in the camp that believes wearing a mask is giving up your freedom and you sense frustration when you see so many masks, understand that behind some of those masks are people with real concerns for friends and family and real pain because of loss. You wouldn't tell someone who lost their parents to CoVid that wearing a face covering is giving up his rights. If you would you have a covering over your heart.

Or if, for example, you are in the camp that believes people should not be getting together and you are filled with frustration when you see groups gathering, understand there are stories beneath those gatherings. Perhaps the gathering of families you saw in the park are parents who feel their kids are losing their personalities or are not themselves anymore. Maybe the people are just hungry for community and won't live without it any longer.

We do and will have differing viewpoints as Christians on these matters, but what our Lord is really clear about is how we are to treat one another: “Let all bitterness, anger and wrath, shouting and slander be removed from you, along with all malice. And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ.” (Ephesians 4:31-32).

Being overly consumed by responding to one aspect of the pandemic (whether the virus or the implications) is likely to cause us to be insensitive to people dealing with the other side of the pandemic. We are to be kind and compassionate to one another. There are two pandemics. As Christians, we don't need to minimize one to emphasize the other. But we do need to be kind and compassionate to one another and understand that one of those pandemics is likely driving each person's thinking and behavior. There are stories, pains, and struggles beneath the surface, and may we be kind and compassionate.