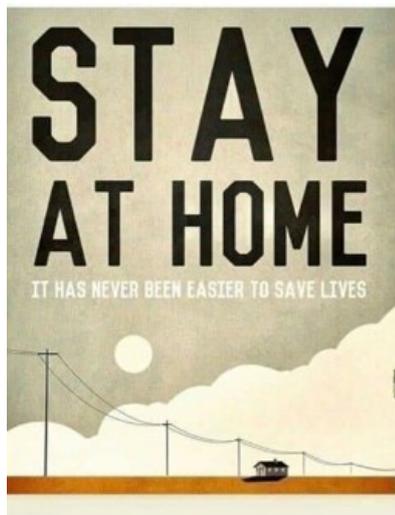


Nothing new under the sun

While we are all feeling the effects of the pandemic by way of what we think of as “unprecedented” restrictions at present, we should remember that our recent ancestors went through similar and worse challenges.

At the beginning of the 20th century a flu pandemic devastated the world. Photos from those days back in 1918 look eerily familiar to us (with thanks to Our Planet).



"The questions people asked then are the questions being asked now," said Christopher Nichols recently, an associate professor of history at Oregon State University. He added, "And while it's very rare that history provides a simple straightforward lesson for the present, this is one of those instances."

According to the CDC in America,

“The 1918 influenza pandemic was the most severe pandemic in recent history. It was caused by an H1N1 virus with genes of avian origin. Although there is not universal consensus regarding where the virus originated, it spread worldwide during 1918-1919.

In the United States, it was first identified in military personnel in spring 1918. It is estimated that about 500 million people or one-third of the world’s population became infected with this virus. The number of deaths was estimated to be at least 50 million worldwide with about 675,000 occurring in the United States. Mortality was high in people younger than 5 years old, 20-40 years old, and 65 years and older. The high mortality in healthy people, including those in the 20-40 year age group, was a unique feature of this pandemic.

With no vaccine to protect against influenza infection and no antibiotics to treat secondary bacterial infections that can be associated with influenza infections, control efforts worldwide were limited to non-pharmaceutical interventions such as isolation, quarantine, good personal hygiene, use of disinfectants, and limitations of public gatherings...”

Lessons learned in those tragic events, though not in our personal experience (and few would have heard stories of those times from their elders), inform us about what we are seeing in the tireless efforts of governments, health workers, scientists, and more today.

Those events remind us too that many faithful Christians prayed for the world during those days and pitched in to take their part in keeping others safe and serving their neighbours and communities.

Those times past also offer some hope in that a new did world emerge after time with many important scientific, social, and political adaptations. If we are to take heed of the problems authorities faced in 1918, we would do well to strive to be people of patience, prayer, discipline and resilience for some time yet. During the (more virulent) second wave in 1918, many citizens around the world became tired of, or suspicious of the guidelines and restrictions that were imposed upon them, to the great detriment of the effort to suppress the 1918 Flu and its impact.

In the summer of 1919 that pandemic ended, not because of a vaccine, but because many died and others developed immunity.

Medical authorities tell us COVID-19 is a very different enemy. Lessons learned from the efforts past, however, show that 3 attitudes were a threat back then and may well be today: hubris, isolationism, and distrust (with thanks to The American Public Health Association, Nov. 2018).

- **Hubris** is a threat in the sense that we may place all our eggs of hope in the one basket of a miracle vaccine. Instead, adaptation of life by all of may be necessary for some time.
- **Isolationism** is a threat in the sense that, while closing borders makes sense, working collaboratively with other nations and states to co-create therapies, vaccines, policies, protocols, etc. is vital.
- **Distrust** is a threat, as it was in 2018, in that the public’s failure to trust the guidance offered by public health officials makes a bad situation worse. In our age of “fake news” and cynicism towards authority and mass-media, we need clear communication and encouraging examples of common responsibility and care for the wellbeing of others – especially the most vulnerable in our communities.

The 1918 pandemic differed greatly due to the complexities of a world war, but many experts agree that the most effective immediate response was then -- and is now -- physical distancing, according to Dr. Nichols (quoted earlier). "It was called 'crowding' control" back then, he said. "But whatever you call it, limiting contact helped in 1918 -- and it works today. And the faster comprehensive closures and social distancing are put into place, the quicker a pandemic can be brought under control," Nichols added.

Those who lived through the 1918 flu learned that lesson the hard way, according to Carolyn Orbann, a medical anthropologist at the University of Missouri, in Columbia. "As with all pandemics, in 1918 you had a tension between biological reality and socioeconomic reality," she said. "Biology is not changeable. But behaviour is. So yes, physical distancing was absolutely a thing in 1918, and where it was practiced, it worked." "But out of fear, panic, mistrust, special interests -- and even sheer boredom," Orbann said, "many were too slow to get on board and too quick to jump ship."

Whatever your political views, please pray for those in authority to have wisdom and endurance at this time. So too, pray for our health workers and scientists that people may receive the care and therapy they need, and that vaccine research may be successful. So too, pray for our aged care sector, for the elderly residents of same, and their respective families and their carers at this time -- an urgent area of need indeed.

Let's each play our role in the necessary restrictions we face at this time as an act of care for others, and for ourselves. Here's a prayer to add to your devotions...

Dear Heavenly Father,

You are the God of all compassion and comfort. We thank you that you listen to our prayers. We pray today for our world, our nation, our city and our church as the Coronavirus spreads. Please bring help to all our communities according to their needs. Heal those afflicted and strengthen all who have the responsibility for care. In your mercy, please provide a cure and give wisdom to those seeking to develop therapies and a vaccine for this condition. We pray, too, for ourselves. Enable us to walk by faith. Help us to be careful and wise in taking whatever precautions are necessary to limit and contain the spread of this virus. Strengthen us to remain calm while vigilant; responsible citizens seeking the welfare of others above ourselves. At times of uncertainty and anxiety, help our world to look to security in your Son, Jesus Christ. And give courage to Christians as we point others to the One in whom there is always hope.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Steve Webster 30 July 2020