

Pastoral Statement on Vaccinations

As a pastor, it is my charge to help people understand what it means to love God and neighbor. Indeed, one of the best ways we can love God is by loving neighbor. I am not a doctor, so I do not give out medical advice, but I do know what doctors, infectious disease specialists, and health officials have said. They have made it clear that vaccines are safe and effective, and furthermore are critical for us overcoming this pandemic. I encourage you to speak to your physician about this directly if you have medical questions.

Because sometimes religion has offered a problematic voice in these matters, I feel compelled to offer my voice in supporting vaccination from a theological perspective. One hears a lot of talk about “freedom” these days, but it is clear this talk is working off a definition of freedom that is lacking or at least not Christian. In the wider culture, freedom may well have come to mean freedom from imposition or even inconvenience, freedom from having individual choices impacted by communal decisions.

For the Christian, however, I believe freedom is not primarily freedom *from*, it is freedom *for* and freedom *to*. In Christ, we are free to live *for* our neighbor. We are free *to* serve one another. We recognize that living in a way that endangers others is not an enactment of true freedom; it is putting the self above others, something against which the Scriptures warn us continually. For Christians, sacrifice for others is not an infringement, but a spiritual discipline and key religious value. Another way to think of sacrifice is making an offering, an offering of oneself for the good and protection of others. After all, that is precisely what Jesus made of his life, a holy and sacred offering.

A vaccination, a mask, these are offerings we can make for our neighbors if not ourselves. They are ones I have made and will continue to make.

In Christ, Rob