

Reflection and Prayertime: Seeking to Understand-The Maintenance of Compassionate Care

August 30, 2021

I'm in a "Mean Moms" group of friends that has existed for 2 decades. Our children are now completing Master's degrees or getting engaged; only one of is in the grinding crunch of at home minor children right now but we still like to meet. Maybe we are a little less mean now that we are not so fatigued in the day to day challenges of raising children and trying to be Marvelous Moms.

Recently my Mean Mom friend Tracy was describing how her adult daughter who manages a bridal shop had to deal with a customer who was planning a wedding in less than 6 months and who'd been completely unreasonable about expectations and Tracy said, exasperated, "Who plans a wedding in less than 6 months?! Someone irresponsible or crazy?!"

I found myself squirming in my seat at her exasperation. My son got engaged earlier this year and there are so many factors in play that will make the wedding planning so very challenging and we would love to have the luxury of no pandemic to plan around, no US government bureaucracy, no Albanian embassy bureaucracy to work around. We can't plan ahead now because we don't know if the fiance' application will get approved or when, and now I am

grateful Albania stepped up to take in Afghan refugees but it will most certainly slow progress for my son and future daughter-in-law so even more unknowns. When she is approved and at point of arrival, they have 90 days to get married or she has to return. It's a huge life change for a 22 year old who's never left Albania so we need to allow space for an exit ramp if she gets here and it's too overwhelming and she's not sure about this. Also the longer it takes for the wedding to happen, the greater the delay on being able to get the next steps in place for her to be able to work, etc. Suffice it to say it's complicated and likely we will likely be planning a wedding in 90 days or less and be one of those exasperating people, but not of our own choosing. Often we don't understand the complexity of people's lives, nor take the time to understand. We judge before looking under the hood or seeking to understand.

Will Leitch shared the following in an article entitled "Stop Sneering at Unvaccinated People Getting Sick. My mother, [Sally Leitch](#), worked as an emergency room nurse at the Sarah Bush Lincoln Health Center in Mattoon, Illinois, for nearly 35 years. You name it, she saw it. Every single day she went into her job, she saw people at the absolute lowest moment of their lives, people desperate for help, people mourning for their loved ones, people terrified and lonely, people saying goodbye, people without anyone to say goodbye to them. Every day, people begged my mother for assistance, screamed in her face, or both. We are at our worst when we or our loved ones are in the hospital. We are so scared.

My mother dealt with that, every day, with one core fundamental principle in place: Everyone deserves the best care possible. She took care of hardened criminals, convicted sex offenders, drunk drivers who had just killed a child before coming into the ER, and she took care of all of them with the same care and attention as she took care of her priest when he was admitted. That is the job: To care for and tend to the sick. It doesn't matter who they were, or what they did, before they came into the emergency room. All that matters is that they are there, and that they need you. That's the job. That's the oath.

Right now, we have reached the stage of the pandemic in the United States where our hospitals (and, in some cases, morgues) are filling up once again with patients suffering from Covid-19. It is deeply distressing to witness, and a thousandfold worse for the medical professionals who thought they had been through the worst of this and now find themselves in the same war-like conditions they were in last fall and winter. It's awful. It's so awful.

The difference between the hospital surge this summer and the ones last fall, though, is that the vast, vast majority of people in the hospital now had the opportunity to receive a vaccine that would keep them safe but chose not to do so — and are now fighting for their lives as a result. This has led to a spate of stories about these patients, lying on what might be their deathbed, lamenting their foolishness. “I messed up: It was my fault,” [one indicative patient said](#). “I could have done research. I could have gotten the vaccine.

I could have gotten my kids vaccinated, but I was negligent. I was so tied up with moving houses [that] I didn't make it an urgency. Now, we don't have a choice to go back."

These stories, on their surface, would seem to serve a public good: Vaccine converts, having suffered dire consequences, trying to dissuade people from making the same mistake that they did. And this has had some success: Vaccination rates in states like Louisiana and Florida have gone up in recent weeks. But it's also having another effect: It's turning many of those who have been vaccinated into monsters. I've seen it plenty, and you have too: *Serves them right. They refuse the science of the vaccine but they want it now, when it's too late.*

Look: I get the frustration with the unvaccinated. [I have it myself.](#) To see people stubbornly hanging onto to misinformation, and holding the rest of us back, can be infuriating: I'm not particularly excited to put my mask back on all the time either. I get it. But the idea that the unvaccinated sick somehow deserve an extra level of scorn, even that we should be refusing them medical care out of some sort of performative, cruel *make-them-learn-their-lesson* exercise, is monstrous and inhuman. It is not at all different than standing over the bed of a person dying of lung cancer and taunting them with, "well, you *shouldn't have smoked!*" It is the opposite of how medical care works. And it is corrosive and destructive to everyone.

I know that social media has led to the normalization of otherwise reasonable human beings just spewing out the first thought that enters their brain, and I know that “self-righteous” has become basically everyone’s Relationship Status at this point. But it is worth taking a step back, to avoid retreating to our corners, and remembering that everyone, even those who refuse to get a life-saving vaccine, even those [who are holding us back and keeping in this never-ending pandemic cycle](#), are human beings who deserve the best medical coverage dedicated professionals can give them. The refusal of the unvaccinated to realize that We Are All In This Together is making the pandemic worse, and longer, than it has to be. But believing that We Are All In This Together does not stop when you get you the vaccine. We cannot lose our souls in the constant battle. If you find some sort of nasty justice in seeing a fellow citizen dying of a terrible disease, you’re not helping. You’re dead center as part of the problem.”

I’ll end with the words of Albert Camus: “In the midst of hate, I found there was, within me, an invincible love. In the midst of tears, I found there was, within me, an invincible smile. In the midst of chaos, I found there was, within me, an invincible calm. I realized, through it all, that in the midst of winter, I found there was, within me, an invincible summer. And that makes me happy. For it says that no matter how hard the world pushes against me, within me there’s something stronger, something better, pushing right back.