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## **A Temporary, Necessary, Evil**

By the Rev. J. Randolph Alexander, Jr.

I heard it again on the radio the other day. And I know you have, too. The quiet, somber music and a pastoral, reassuring voice told me that it was yet another commercial about the virus. Our boys have taken to calling them “corona-mercials,” and I quite agree. This particular one featured an excited proprietor saying that you could do business with him with “no human contact.” No human contact. Let that sink in for a minute.

I know what he was saying, and I get it. He is trying to do business and offer his best in an impossible time and situation. And good for him. But still, something about his message sent a cold chill down my spine. No human contact.

How many of you have had this experience lately? You are out for a walk on a beautiful day, and you see someone heading towards you on the sidewalk and your immediate reaction is, “Oh, no! I have to get away from them.” And perhaps even worse, you see them look at you as a potential source of danger to be avoided!

Again, I get it. Not only do we need to do this right now, we must do it for the good of all. But it still gives me a chill. Is this any way to live long-term -- fearing the other? Rather than a potential source of danger coming down the street, doesn't our Christian faith prompt us to remember, somehow, maybe deep down, that this is a beloved child of God?

Writer and lay theologian C. S. Lewis wrote in *The Weight of Glory* that, were we able to see the person before us as God sees him or her, it would change our view of the other forever. Lewis encouraged people "to remember that the dullest most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship."

We need, require, and thrive on human contact. I think back to studies with animals and human babies who are not touched, held, and hugged enough early on, and how they fail to thrive. We Christians are a tactile bunch. We lay on hands when we ordain, or confirm, or consecrate bread and wine, or pray for healing. We pour water and we anoint with holy oil. We bless newly married couples and we anoint those who are dying. Beyond that, we hug, shake hands, and cry together.

Our Lord embraced lepers his society had long rejected. At the core of all of this is our fundamental belief that God actually became one of us and with us in Jesus Christ, wore our flesh, and hallowed it forever (John 1). This is a far cry from solitary individuals staring at lonely computer screens.

And yet. And yet. Thank God, for now, for those computer screens! They offer a pale reflection of the full life we took for granted. But they are a blessing and something good.

One way of describing evil is naming that which pulls people apart, separates us, and makes us look only to our own interests. In calling the virus evil, I am not assigning it conscious intent, but the observed and undeniable effect of the virus could be called evil. It pulls us apart and tears to shreds so much that makes our lives real and worthwhile.

What are we to do as Christians? We pray and worship and give thanks, especially for our health care professionals, front-line and essential workers,

and for so many others who put themselves in harm's way, particularly those who care for the sick and dying. We pray mightily for those bringing all of their professional experience and skills to bear in searching for a vaccine and treatments. We help those who are struggling right now in any way we can, and, by God's grace, we do not lose faith or hope.

I hope you will appreciate this video that I came across quite by accident. While it is not technically "religious," I believe Bruce Springsteen's interaction with a young fan shows the power of human connection, even for the rich and famous. Watch it with an open heart and remember that this is more how we are supposed to be together.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VVzi8tM2Qlw>