**“A Time to Heal”**

***Ecclesiastes***

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 It was a warm Sunday morning, nice enough for one of the deacons to open a few windows to let the breeze in. I was sitting next to a good friend, someone I enjoyed being with and who had had a wonderful influence on my children. He was a man of great faith, a farmer, played a mean game of ping pong, college graduate who volunteered to serve overseas for two years, and a lover of vanilla ice cream. One of his gifts was seeing the needs of others and seeking a way to meet those needs without creating dependency.

 As the offering plate was being passed from his hands to mine, I noticed that his one hand was red and swollen. The fingers looked like over-stuffed bratwurst sausages ready to explode. I asked what was going on with his hand and he showed me where he had accidentally stuck himself with a needle in the ham of his thumb while vaccinating baby pigs.

 I responded in a low voice, as not to be disruptive, that it was no longer the right time to sing, fellowship, give, or worship, but rather to make a quick trip to the emergency room for a little healing. A few minutes later we were at the hospital where he was told that the contaminated needle was causing a nasty infection that was already moving up his arm. He was scolded by the man in the white coat for delaying treatment, and that if left unattended he might have lost his hand, or worse.

 One of the many consequences of the current explosion of COVID-19 has been the reluctance of individuals, including farmers, to seek needed medical attention due to the fear of being exposed to patients with the coronavirus. In fact, some emergency rooms are reporting a 50% or greater reduction in patients being served. This fear, though often stimulated by over-the-top reporting and images from the media, is causing unnecessary suffering and, in some cases, killing people. I am aware of two cases where a heart attack victim refused to go to the emergency room. In a separate situation an individual who had experienced a stroke delayed seeking medical treatment for more than a day out of fear of being exposed to coronavirus. These emotions are very real in the moment, but they do not represent a good understanding of the actual risks involved in ***not*** seeking critically needed medical care.

 Farmers, by their very nature, do not get along well with healthcare providers. They, in general, would prefer to self-diagnose, self-medicate, and self-assess when they are physically ready to return to work. In addition to the uncomfortable perspective of what takes place in an emergency room, the waiting involved, and the lack of appropriate reading material in the waiting room, there is a very real issue of the widespread lack of adequate healthcare insurance to cover the cost of medical services. For many, the cost of visiting the emergency room largely disappears with the wave of a plastic Blue Cross/Blue Shield or other insurance card. While, on the other hand, a farmer sees the visit as being equivalent to a semi-load of grain, or two or three head of beef being lost with no tax write-off.

 If a farmer in your social circle is exhibiting symptoms of a serious health issue, don’t remain silent or become an “enabler”. Get in his or her face, load him into the truck or call 911. Tell him you love him and you’re not going to stand by and watch him die on your watch. Refuse to accept his unfounded arguments that hospitals are too expensive or only for “sick people”, or that the risk of catching COVID-19 is too high. Your actions may be directly responsible for saving his life.