

Small Talk – May 24 2021
By Michael Small

Early morning hearing the thunder and the rain showers I know it is time to get moving. And I am thrilled for the feeling that we are getting closer to normal. I see the pictures of people gathering, I see smiles on faces, I hear laughter and conversation in the air. But there is still concern.

I also woke to these words moving through my thoughts.

I'm gonna lay down my burden, down by the riverside.
Down by the riverside, down by the riverside.
I'm gonna lay down my burden, down by the riverside.
I'm gonna study war no more.

“Down By the Riverside” is a spiritual that was sung by slaves in the South as a work song. It dates back to before the American Civil War. The song has been sung in churches, vacation bible schools, children, youth, and family camps, during the tumult of the 1960’s and 1970’s. It is a song that comes from a deep weariness while at the same time lifting up hope – for “I’m gonna lay down my burden, down by the riverside.” I’m not going to study war – No more!

Not having fought in a war or having ever been confronted by extreme violence – I can only imagine what that must be like. I can only see and feel the horror from a distance. The impact is not felt in my bones. Even with the graphic images in our media I can only get a glimpse, moving from the intellectual understanding to the gut-wrenching feeling is sometimes too slow. But I do know, in my bones, thoughts, and feelings, that war always brings unspeakable violence, it never builds up, but tears down and destroys. It kills, it kills those who are made in the image of God. It destroys all life. It does not discriminate, the elderly, the young, the infant, families who are peacefully abiding in their homes or at their work. Sometimes they are simply named “collateral damage”. Those words are insidious and speak carelessly about life so preciously created and begun.

Why these thoughts? I am responding to the upcoming Memorial Day weekend when we remember those who have died in service to country, and generally speaking, those who have died in the past year. There are many names on that list, too many. Secondly, It feels like we have been at war with Covid for over a year and we have been at war with one another. I cannot shake the images of January 6, the day of Epiphany, when an “Insurrection Party” boldly moved upon the landscape of our democracy. They remain active. I fear for the future when we have stopped walking alongside one another, instead fighting with one another. Thirdly, none of us can shake the continuing and unspeakable gun violence on our streets just the weekend, and the continuing violence upon black and brown bodies.

Lastly, I am thinking about the residents of Cass County. As of May 23, the Covid statistics for Minnesota continue to drop and 52.8% of population have received dose 1+ of their vaccine and the Positivity Rate for Covid is at 3.8%. But in Cass County only 38.7% of population have received dose 1+ of their vaccine and the Positivity Rate for Covid is at 13.4%.¹ It is recommended that folks be cautious if the Positivity Rate is above 5% - 7%. Cass County's Risk Level is "Very High" or 4 on a scale of 1-5.

Individually we cannot end war, violence, conflict, racial inequity, but each of us can make a difference in the infectious rates of Covid-19 in our communities. Frankly, it is too high in Cass County. We can end this war. All of us need to encourage one another to get vaccinated. It is easy, painless (mostly), and free. Let's lay our burdens down – get the vaccine. And if you need more information talk with your friends, those who have been vaccinated, speak with your medical provider. Every Minnesotan over 12 years old is eligible to be vaccinated! For the common good and health of all, being vaccinated is something all of us can do!

Let's continue to become healthy and well by walking with one another, sharing our burdens, hope, visions, and love.

In the spirit and agape love of Jesus, Michael

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¹ From "Covid Act Now" (<https://covidactnow.org/?s=1857775>)