

A Sermon on Death Tolls of Pestilence

Sermon by Rev. Minister Angela Smith of COPE for September 24th, 2023 (and beyond)

Given the 18th-20th century death tolls due to various pandemics and epidemics, I wonder at times if the grief from the loss of lives due to those diseases as well as prejudice or superstitions lent to allegations resulting from deathbed ramblings of those suffering hallucinations, delusions, illusions, and/or psychosis as symptoms of diseases including Tuberculosis (TB), Typhus, and the Bubonic Plague.

England and Wales had a collective total population of 17.9 million people in 1850. Source: https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-349-06558-5_3 Between 1851-1910, roughly 25% of the same population died of tuberculosis alone. Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_tuberculosis#:~:text=In%20western%20contine%20Europe%2C%20epidemic,to%2024%20died%20from%20TB. “The typhus epidemic caused two to three million deaths out of 20–30 million cases in Russia between 1918 and 1922.” Source: <https://thebulletin.org/2023/01/deadliest-pandemics/#russia-typhus> 12 million people in India died of the Bubonic Plague out of 169 million total population between 1898-1918. Source: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7513766/> “Throughout the 1600-1800s in Europe, TB caused 25% of all deaths.” Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/tb/worldtbdays/history.htm>

“Studies have found higher prevailing rates of mental illness, including psychosis in tuberculosis. Psychosis in tuberculosis may result as adverse effects of anti-tubercular drugs including isoniazid, ciprofloxacin, etambutol and rifampicin [2,3] or maybe a presenting complaints in cases of intracranial tuberculoma.” Source: https://www.jcdr.net/article_fulltext.asp?id=6130#:~:text=Psychosis%20in%20tuberculosis%20may%20result,of%20intracranial%20tuberculoma%20%5B3%5D.

“In patients with murine typhus presenting with altered sensorium, neurological complications should be suspected, as early diagnosis and treatment will alter the prognosis and reduce the mortality rate. Patients may present with vivid hallucinations and signs of aseptic meningitis.” Source: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6561526/#:~:text=In%20patients%20with%20murine%20typhus,and%20signs%20of%20aseptic%20meningitis>.

Regarding the bubonic plague and any illness accompanied by high fevers: “Due to a high fever, one becomes mentally confused and unable to understand the surrounding environment, with very unstable emotions, causing conscious and cognitive disturbances such as illusions or hallucinations—that is, delirium...In this era, if a child was afflicted with a plague and had hallucinations, people believed that the child became numinous. Since their parents only responded through prayer, due to ignorance regarding effective treatments for the disease, most children affected by this condition died (Fig. 1). It is truly a pity for clever children to die and disappear from a single illness. People say, “People afflicted with this disease sometimes show magical powers and in other cases engage in

strange behaviors. What can they be other than ghosts?" Source: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9533171/>

The grieving survivors that make up our human ancestry worldwide, recorded history from their perspectives in the midst of ongoing turmoil, confusion, and immense grief. Potentially enemies would see their great losses as an opportunity to seize territory and expand an empire. If so, even if just providing foreign aid with no intention to capitalize on nor exploit their weakened state, the outsiders may be demonized for the loss by those overcome by grief, particularly where any inadvertently spread disease by reusing blankets last used by people with tuberculosis, typhus, or the plague. This is all possible without introducing the use of mind-altering drugs and just as a result of mind-altering fevers or viruses. If such is compounded by food scarcity, malnutrition and starvation can also cause changes in mood and behavior that may include psychosis. Source: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4274583/#:~:text=Starvation%20during%20early%20adolescence%2C%20more,the%20starvation%20episodes%5B21%5D>.

More than 70 million people died of starvation in the world in the 20th century. Source: <https://www.socialscienceinaction.org/resources/famine-in-the-twentieth-century/> But, more than 100 million people died of starvation in the world in the 19th century. Source: <https://ourworldindata.org/famines#:~:text=At%20least%20in%20proportionate%20terms,than%20the%20combined%20figure%20for>

Are zombie apocalypse stories (including films) today psychic echoes of what it may have been like for everyone where at times 25% or more of the population were falling ill with some fever or experiencing psychotic breaks due to hunger or both? Could someone who is ill and quarantined or their family feel unjustly torn apart? Could the quarantine itself result in assuming secrecy or foul play to any denied their last moments or any final goodbyes with a loved one in quarantine and destroyed to prevent further spread? Could references to diseased persons be misinterpreted as dehumanizing the afflicted in any historical documents? Could ignorance and prejudice result in demonizing from all perspectives at the above moments in history?

The above are things I've been thinking about recently that I believe should be contemplated by everyone. I think categorizing deaths due to gunshot wounds where COVID-19 was present shouldn't be categorized as COVID-19 deaths and do wonder if anything similar happened above as well. Sources: <https://cbs12.com/news/local/i-team-deaths-incorrectly-attributed-to-covid-19-in-palm-beach-county> and <https://www.freedomfoundation.com/washington/washington-health-officials-gunshot-victims-counted-as-covid-19-deaths/> But, if the perpetrators and victims are all dead or the statutes of limitation have run on any effective prosecutions, I believe it is overall best to move on. And, where that isn't possible, I believe full context should be provided to the extent possible while understanding everyone is free to check as many facts or sources as we wish before reaching any conclusions, particularly where hate or demonization of anyone may result.

It may have been traumatic stress from the earlier pandemics that wiped out 25% or more of the human population of earth that resulted in COVID-19 overreach. Sometimes when

people experience trauma and grief, we overcompensate going forward in hopes to prevent a repeat. And, as someone who lives with both traumatic stress and grief I understand.

Parasites still kill over 1,000,000 people per year in the world. Source: <https://speakingofmedicine.plos.org/2015/01/16/one-million-deaths-parasites/> Parasitic infections sicken 3.5 billion people annually. Source: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8397551/#:~:text=Globally%2C%20due%20to%20intestinal%20parasitic,200%2C000%20deaths%20are%20reported%20annually>. The parasites are the problem, not the people.

“The Black Death, which killed millions throughout Europe in a pandemic stretching from the 14th to 19th centuries, was likely spread by parasites such as fleas and lice carried on the human body.” Source: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/science/black-death-fleas-lice-1.4485664>

With language barriers I believe one could see how things might be misinterpreted even now. And, sometimes people live up to their worst reputation while trying to redirect blame and reveal themselves to be fascists whether they deserve all the credit or not.

I hope you found this all food for thought and appreciate your audience. Amen.

For those interested in starting #TaoFu Self-Defense Exercises, please see <https://www.cope.church/taofu.htm> and begin at any time.

There are opportunities to send messages, receive mystery bonus blessings, and more with or without donating available now on our "Pass the Basket" page at <https://www.cope.church/basket.htm> . Thank You.

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:32 KJV Willful blindness is an abomination.

COPE accepts Feedback, critical and complimentary. Learn more at <https://www.cope.church/feedback.htm> . For the sake of keeping myself and others humble, a sense of humor is welcome on all sides.