

WE ARE IN A LIMINAL SPACE IN THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK

Jim here.

This will be a short post, mostly to give us a new conversation thread.

But there are a few things that show us that reality is setting in in our society, if not necessarily in the White House. Virtually all professional and college sports are now shut down. Most universities are online only now. Many public schools have closed. More and more businesses are allowing employees to work from home.

We are now in a liminal space. Our church introduced me to that term while we are searching to replace a minister who recently retired. A liminal space is that time between what was and what will be. Thanks to COVID-19, normal is what was. It is gone and will be gone for quite some time.

Sadly, the beneficial effects of the social distancing that is finally coming into being will be delayed. Before we get to the benefits, we will experience the whirlwind that has been unleashed by months of denying the virus. This is just my estimate, but from all the published comparisons between the US outbreak and Italy's, we are just a few days, probably less than a week, away from hospitals in the hot zones being over capacity and having to resort to excruciating levels of triage, literally choosing who lives and who dies.

Also, Republicans are being dragged kicking and screaming into the realization that our healthcare system and our gig economy mean that huge swathes of our population, without government intervention, face bankruptcy and death with no chance of treatment.

Each of us will have to choose how we live in this liminal space. For those who are able to go along with social distancing, we will need to learn to eat all our meals at home. We will need to find ways to occupy our time if we aren't working and the usual sports entertainment is unavailable. But it is vital that we realize that despite being physically separated, we must embrace our shared humanity and the shared experience of facing the unknown together.

Maybe there's someone who lives close to you who is even higher risk than you are. Perhaps you can give them a call and ask if they'd like you to leave a meal at their door. Maybe you have acquaintances whose employment has disappeared today. Maybe you can slip them a few bucks if you can afford it. Maybe they'd also like a meal at their door.

Even more frightening, is the "what will be" for folks who must continue working. Somehow, grocery stores will have to stay open. Police and fire services have to continue, along with EMS, of course. Healthcare workers are soon to be completely overwhelmed and most likely sequestered for the duration of the outbreak in areas where hospitals near capacity. If you know families of those workers, maybe they could use a hand with errands or meals. They will be terrified about their loved ones staying healthy while on the front lines of this battle. Support those families any way you can.

In the meantime, many thanks to all in this wonderful emptywheel community who have been chiming in with timely updates and analysis. Please keep it coming. So many people are getting so much help from you. But also, let's have some fun too, to ease the tension. Share a joke. Share ideas for entertainment streaming for those sequestered. Above all, know that we are all in this together and our best bet for getting through it is to work together (just don't cough on me or touch me).