

## WHAT A CRAZY YEAR!

Between politics and pandemics, our normal patterns of life have been severely disrupted. There has been a worldwide eruption of social and personal anxiety. Fear has motivated many toward division and isolation and destructive action. Natural disasters have played their part too. Even as I write this, our little piece of heaven up north is witnessing its own COVID-19 outbreak. So the craziness continues on...

However, there have been positive points, “flickers of grace” as a friend of mine put it. And I have learned a few things that will stick with me:



- **We are all connected in a vital way.** Sad that it takes a microscopic villain to remind us of such a basic truth. But there it is. Suffering does bind us. It doesn't matter whether you are rich or poor, black or white, happy or depressed, first, second, or third world, this little spherical demon is an equal opportunity destroyer.
- **We are more fragile than we think.** Tragedy is humbling. When we are faced with life-upsetting events where our control of it rests near zero, we have two choices: Continue to bang our heads against the wall with even greater force or we can stop what we're doing and reassess the situation. A position of seeming weakness can also be a position of new found *clarity*.
- **We have been invited to rethink our commitment to the public good.** Most of us take for granted that we should be decent and civil in the greater marketplace. But what about if we are angry or terrified or really, really frustrated. Our decency is tested. We are tempted to justify ourselves in our mental, verbal, or physical violence. There has been so much lashing out amidst the cries of pain. So many bleeding bodies, both figuratively and materially. Take the whole masking thing. I know people who are the anti-maskers who won't be told what to do. Then there are those who even wear their mask riding in a vehicle by themselves. Where is the reasonable middle way? It's hard. But the fact that a mask isn't for you does challenge our willingness to sacrifice for the good of the other.
- **Finally, we have witnessed that a backdrop of darkness only serves to emphasize the light.** That is, acts of goodness and compassion stand out. Sometimes you have to consciously seek them out. But they're there. Sometimes they are mere whispers in the cacophony of the self-absorbed shouting matches. Like the high school cross country runner who was seventy-five yards from qualifying for the state championship when she came across a fellow runner who had fallen and was in bad shape. This girl, Maggie is her name, made a split-second decision to trade competition for compassion. She told the fallen runner, “you can't not finish this when you are so close”, picked her up and walked with her until she got her footing. About 20 other runners passed them during this selfless act.

Thank you, Maggie, for giving us a glimpse of Jesus. You may be one single ray of light but you are joined by others: nurses who have finished their 14 hr. day caring for cranky patients or single moms who fall into bed after working three jobs or a soldier on a lonely all-night watch in the freezing rain so we can rest in safety. Small, subtle rays of light and hope.

That's God's M.O. God doesn't come crashing in with fireworks to impose His "Right Way". No, the Eternal God shows up as a little, helpless baby with dirty diapers in a sheep trough in some insignificant out-of-the-way village. God's goodness often feels like a whimper, a barely discernible background melody, a small candle against the wind. Yet God's small candle lights another candle. That candle lights some more candles, then more and more and more. Pretty soon, all those single flames become an unstoppable beacon, shining hope and renewal over an entire planet.

And that's what Christmas is all about.

Merry Christmas to all,  
Scott

P.S. Join us for a time of virtual carols and a timely Christmas message on Facebook LIVE!, Dec. 24<sup>th</sup>, 7 pm.