

A Few Thoughts for the Hunkered Down

Thursday, December 31, 2020

Hooray for Hope!

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. —Romans 8:18-25

Hope is one of the “Cardinal Virtues” which Paul often mentioned, and probably the least celebrated of the three (Faith, Hope and Love). For years I have chided the congregation for not embracing hope as we should, but I find I now owe you people an apology! We are all coming to grasp and celebrate hope in a new and fresh way, and this is reason for joy.

Hope has to do with the future and the wonderful plans which God has for us, in spite of whatever troubles we may be experiencing at the moment. Hope meant a great deal to the people of the New Testament as life was hard and it was easier to dream of a better tomorrow and of the coming Day of the Lord. In our modern days we find ourselves living in great comfort and for this reason the future scares us. When one is doing well the future readily reminds us of all the troubles which might come and derail our comforts. Living in this kind of setting we find hope a less appealing item—until now.

This year has brought a great change in our perspective. COVID has come with a vengeance and has made life a lot sadder and more difficult. Many have experienced the pain of losing loved ones to the virus. All have felt the stress and sadness of isolation, of limited social events and travel, of shuttered businesses and many related problems. It would seem that all are suffering from COVID depression. 2020 quickly became a year that we wanted to get behind us without delay. We all know that time is a precious commodity and one should be very cautious of wishing time away, but presently we are reminded that some seasons cannot end quickly enough. When people have experienced a particularly troubling year, I have in the past suggested

that they celebrate the coming of the New Year with a calendar burning party, and a few folks have taken me up on the suggestion! It has been a rough year, and I would imagine that a lot of soon to be obsolete calendars will be joyfully torched.

And what of 2021? We are starting it with the virus still very present. There is a general feeling that this New Year must be better. How could it be worse? (Let's not go there!) The vaccine is looking like a certainty and now we await its actual availability. This mess may soon be history! But can we be sure that all will go according to plan? We are learning about hope in a big way.

May this New Year be a lesson in hope which lasts long beyond 2021. We pray for and anticipate COVID's demise in a few months. May this virus be remembered as a symbol of our fallen world and a lesson in hope. As Paul told the Roman believers, this world is subjected to frustration and death, and we await a joyful day of redemption. 2021 may indeed be a good year, but we await an even greater future.

Hooray for a vaccine! Hooray for 2021! And whatever happens in these days ahead, hooray for hope!

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

Almighty God, by whose mercy my life has been yet prolonged to another year, grant that thy mercy may not be in vain. Let not my years be multiplied to increase my guilt, but as age advances, let me become more pure in my thoughts, more regular in my desires, and more obedient to thy laws. Let not the cares of the world distract me, nor the evils of age overwhelm me. But continue and increase thy loving kindness towards me, and when thou shalt call me hence, receive me to everlasting happiness, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord. —Samuel Johnson, 1709-84