

Times and Seasons

Big Thoughts in a COVID-19 World

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I have to admit, it feels like we have been through the longest, darkest winter in history, and winter is still to come! I had always wanted to be stationed in Alaska during my time in the Air Force, but I was always concerned about how those long, dark winters would affect me - and I love winter!

Well, I love snow. Winter without snow, like here in Central Illinois, is a complete and total waste of time – no wonder so many around here dislike winter!

Growing up in Minnesota we had lots of snow, it was a fact of life! As kids we lived our lives out in the snow – even Trick or Treating and hunting Easter Eggs some years. We lived on a hill, so there was always sliding. There were huge piles of snow left over from the plowing, so snow forts were all the rage, and when my folks bought snowmobiles, a whole new world opened for us!

Later, cross-country skiing extended my reach in a more peaceful fashion and developed a muscular figure I had never had before – and would love to get back!

Downhill skiing provided another kind of thrill, and I miss it living here. I love the crisp smell of a sub-zero morning, the brilliance of the sun reflecting off a snow-covered landscape, putting on layers of clothing to make it all the more comfortable, and coming inside at the end of a long day out.

But this winter our nation has been experiencing is nothing like that. It seems hard to find light in all the closures and distancing, light in the numbers we hear on the news each night – if there is light, it only comes in the falseness that COVID really hasn't hit us – yet. But it seems to be creeping closer. What will a COVID Christmas look like? Will it finally go away? When will we get a vaccine? All unknown.

There is darkness in that unknown. Darkness in all the issues that concerned us before the virus hit – some we rarely think about these days. That's the power of darkness: it hides darkness. Darkness like the results of this most recent election – some of us finding light in the declared results, some of us declaring that the results have not yet been illuminated. More unknown, more darkness.

What depressing thoughts. How I wish I had a more heartwarming tale to tell, but darkness continues as a theme. But we are not meant to be a people of darkness, are we? That's what makes these times so hard – where is the light that makes life worth the living?

In his first letter to the church in Thessalonica, Paul writes, “But you, sisters and brothers, are not in the dark. The Day of the Lord will not catch you like a thief. No, you are all children of the light and children of the day. We don't belong to the darkness or the night” (5:4-5, Inclusive Bible).

As children of the light, and children of the day, it should be clear that those who call themselves Jesus followers are called to a higher purpose. We are called to rise above the fray of worldly life – not because we are better, but because there is a better way, a way of light! A way of hope.

Darkness only hides darkness but light a single candle of hope in even the darkest of places and people will turn to look – they will follow the light to a better place. But it takes courage to be light amidst the dark. It means standing out in a crowd, being joyful amid the gloom. We need some help!

Paul provides it, reminding us to “put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation” (5:8). Likening faith, love, and hope to armor which serves to protect, and identifies us as serving the God of Jesus Christ. Neither right, nor left. Jesus.

Before closing his letter, Paul says, “...encourage each other and build each other up, just as you're already doing.” That's exactly what we should be doing!

With the times and seasons of Advent and Christmas drawing near, it is time to put on the armor of faith, love and hope, and light the candles of joy, bringing much needed light into a darkened and winter weary world. We can do better America. Stay well, think big. Amen.

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