

## Four Cheers for 2020

It's an annual tradition, ranking among our most cherished activities. Yet you will not find any decorations displayed in its honor. There are few if any popular songs shared for its observance. We do not bake cookies or light candles placed on beautifully decorated cakes and ceremonially extinguish them. No! This practice traverses our minds with little fanfare yet contains great meaning. I'm referring to our desire to reflect on the year past and remember its events.

There is something in our psyche which compels us to reflect during the final days of a calendar year and evaluate things public and private. In the public realm, we list things like celebrities who died during the year and reminisce on their careers. We call to mind events we enjoyed; sporting championships which cheered the hearts of some and evoked a 'wait till next year' mantra from the rest. Our private world's recall loved ones gained and loved ones lost. We evoke memories of a year gone by and relive its events.

But most of all this annual tradition gives root to our hopes and dreams for the coming year. We weigh the joys and sorrows against the expectations we set 360 days ago, recycling the aspirations of our hearts. So, if I may, offer a few thoughts with the intent to give some greater perspective on the past twelve months. It has indeed been a year of the unexpected, often frustrating and for many fearful. We experienced a pandemic, a bitter election cycle, and seemingly endless episodes of violence in our cities.

But with that said, I'm compelled to point out to those who seek to declare 2020 terrible do so prematurely. In fact, contrary to many social media posting, I believe 2020 was a wonderful year. Oh, that's not to say that the past 365 day's have been perfect, fulfilling all our most intimate dreams. It has however, produced a recognition of some particularly important life attributes.

First, *the importance of family*. No matter your opinion on the politically driven decisions to force business to cease operations, the results gave society the opportunity to step out of the constant rush of activity and refocus our attention on home. Rather than jumping in the car and racing off to the office, parents, out of necessity had to refocus their attention on their children and thus engage directly in parental activities-as opposed to indirect child support. The opportunity for greater familiar bonding was placed in the lap of every mom and dad everywhere. We are now given the opportunity to reprioritize our family bonds before special interest advocates seek to tear down the nuclear family. Now it's the time for people to recognize the importance of families to our overall societal make-up, and work to remove the errors of their past practices. Families can begin anew provided mothers and fathers seek to reestablish the bonds and sanctity of families.

Second, *the role of faith*, in our lives. Because of the COVID pandemic churches across the world were forced to gather using technology. Zoom worship became the in-vogue practice. On the upside - individuals could enjoy their coffee (or favorite breakfast beverage) as they simultaneously enjoyed their local pastor's pulpit teachings, choir anthem, and prayers. But over time there was a greater recognition that congregational gatherings were more than just a time to chat. The pandemic brought to light the truth of the Scriptures exhortation in Hebrews, "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." (10:24,25)

Most importantly the forced isolation allows us to re-embrace what it means to live as a Disciple of Christ in an increasingly secular world and remember that faith and church are not stand alone nouns. With this in mind, 2020 can be the motivation for renewed love toward each other and ministry.

Third, *our need for fellowship*. With the advent of on-line shopping and social media we have continued to separate our private lives from public in person engagement with each other. Thanks to the pandemic practices imposed on the public contacts have diminished our own sense of relationship, thus treating each other as visual objects while substituting superficial interactions for genuine human relationships. Social distancing and the mandate to eliminate hand shaking, hugging, or other previously acceptable greetings has dulled our humanity. The truth of God proclaimed in Genesis has been magnified. “Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone.’” (2:18) Human beings are created to be in relationship with each other. The resulting extended separation we have experienced over the past nine to ten months can be a motivation for all people to reassess how we live out relationships with friends and public acquaintances. In short, 2020 can help us recognize what it means to be human and begin afresh human interaction.

Finally, 2020 can be the *year of renewed freedom*. Never before in the history of this nation have the innocent been punished for the sake of the guilty. Constitutional principles were jettisoned in the name of convenience and individuals were allowed to make across the board decisions with no demand for accountability. A lifetime of planning, saving, working, and visioning, were all placed at the mercy of a handful of selfish individuals. Governmental powers were placed in the hands of individuals who like a child with a new toy were able to do whatever they wished ‘because they could.’ As a result, the hopes and dreams of millions of people were cast aside in a moment. Nearly 250 years of freedom were ignored in favor of about a dozen elite people were enabled to remove the *life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness* of many citizens in states across this country. Such restrictions became reality in 2020, but the spirit of liberty and freedom remains in the heart of the majority of this country’s citizens the majority of who can use 2020 as a capstone to renewed freedom and individual accountability.

Was 2020 the year of immediate prosperity, and good will; not remotely. So, let’s not be quick to cast aside its events. Reflection is important and should never be quickly reduced to a whim which desires only the good that appears on the surface. With respectful thinking it can be the motivation for greater family unity and interaction, Christian disciple through true fellowship, rekindled human respect, and a reinvigorated love of freedom which is the foundation of the great experiment called the United States of America.