

Wednesday, February 24

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2020! Could any of us have imagined what lay ahead as we welcomed a new year? Hurricanes, floods, wildfires, racial and social injustice, political unrest, and a pandemic unlike anything we had ever experienced. I had no idea when I left church on March 8, 2020, that it would be months before I could return. In just a matter of days, schools would go to remote learning, church buildings would be closed, and worship services would be live-streamed. Suddenly life was different, and it became necessary to adjust to a "new normal."

There are so many things that I have missed during these months of the pandemic – things that I often took for granted. I have missed gathering with family to celebrate birthdays and holidays. Opportunities to spend time with friends are no longer within the realm of possibility. I have mourned the loss of being able to gather with my beloved church family on a weekly basis to worship our God and to fellowship with each other.

In Jeremiah 29:11, God tells us that He has a plan for us – *“not for harm, but for hope and a future.”* Do I think that God planned a pandemic to frighten me, inconvenience me, punish me, or force me to change my way of life? Of course not! But I do believe that God has used this pandemic to change the way I look at life and give me an opportunity to assess what is truly important.

I have come to realize that I am only in control of a limited number of things in my life. As my husband likes to remind me, “Sometimes the only thing you can control is your attitude.” Controlling your attitude can make a big difference in the way you look at life!

I have become keenly aware of the importance of small acts of kindness. A smile, a hello – yes, even from behind a mask – or holding the door for someone show that they are important, that they matter. As Jesus said: *“In as much as you have done it unto one of the least of these...”* Matthew 25:40.

My focus has become gratitude for the little things. Preparing a meal with my spouse, the singing of birds as I walk on the Greenway, technology that keeps me connected with church, friends and family, quiet hours to delve into a new book, and yes, toilet paper, hand sanitizer, and masks are all important provisions from God.

The Lenten journey often involves a focus on giving up something, changing a habit or adopting a new one. In 2020, we had no choice but to do that already. For this 2021 Lenten journey, I propose we simply focus on the cross and the sacrifice made for each of us there, and on the empty tomb and the promise that it holds for our future. To quote our pastor: "We do not know what the future holds, but we do know the one who holds the future." What hope, peace, and joy that should give to each of us who follows Jesus!