

Christmas 2017

Dear Family and Friends:

It was a beautiful spring afternoon. The sun was shining, the sky was blue, the road was clear, the scenery along the way inviting. I did not appreciate any of it. I was too busy grouching and feeling sorry for myself. I spent the morning on the phone making calls related to an accident we had over the weekend. I made a five-hour round trip because the garage where our car was towed would not accept a fax. Would not accept a fax! Really? I had to sign the release of the vehicle to our insurer in person. To add insult to injury (at least in my mind), it took me the better part of an hour to even find the place.

I went to the back of a lot filled with old, rusted automobiles to find our car and retrieve our personal items. What I saw was eye opening. I had walked away from that mangled mess bruised but whole (all the impact was on my side of the car). I had a lot of gall to be in complaint mode.

This incident is a snapshot of our past year. It has been a blessed one, albeit not without its trials. Yet the difficulties, when put in perspective, highlight the blessings we so often take for granted.

It is Christmas. A season to celebrate the birth of the One who brings hope and glad tidings. The immediate events surrounding the Lord's birth looked anything but hopeful and celebratory. Mary's journey to Bethlehem on the back of a donkey while nine months pregnant to register for the Roman census could not have been pleasant. The wise men travelled a great distance only to deal with a devious King Herod anxious to discover the whereabouts of this new king to fulfill his murderous design. When Herod perceived that the Magi were not deceived by his guile, he slaughtered all the infants under a certain age in and around Bethlehem. Meanwhile the Holy Family had to flee to Egypt to escape the king's wrath. Think of it, the Lord of the universe enters the realm that should be his unquestioned domain as an infant refugee. Yet from that tumultuous beginning, millions have drunk from a wellspring of life that transcends pleasant circumstance, material prosperity, and social status.

Our pastor is amid a sermon series "On the Road with Christ." It has been a thoughtful examination of our mindsets and attitudes along this earthly trek. The probing has made me realize how I yearn to age with humility, humor, and grace. One of my favorite quotes expresses the demeanor we so long to be ours:

Let me but live my life from year to year,
With forward face and unreluctant soul;
No hurrying to, nor turning from the goal;
Not mourning for things that disappear in the dim past
Nor holding back in fear from what the future veils;
But with a whole and happy heart,
That pays its toll to youth and age
And travels on with cheer.

The key is not perfect circumstances, the right bucket list, an all-star retirement planner, or the ideal community, but to live with hope and purpose as we follow Christ. We trust that this Christmas will be a time of refreshment and renewal for each of you on your journey.