

Friends:

As 2019 drew to a close, we didn't know what 2020 would bring. This is true at the end of each old year and the beginning of each new year. Prognosticators have lousy batting averages. We certainly have our hopes for the new year as well as some fears.

2020 brought a pandemic, an economic downturn, civil unrest, the rumblings of a racial reckoning. Where was God? God was where God has always been. Right there – in us and beside us, around us, and going ever before us. That's what Christmas is all about – Emmanuel. God with us.

What will 2021 bring? Again, no one knows for sure. Here are my hopes, though. Feel free to share yours. I hope for an end to this unrelenting pandemic. It's my prayer as well. My guess is that this is a hope on a lot of people's lists. We have a ways to go yet until everyone is vaccinated. Out of our love for neighbors and in accordance with the best scientific knowledge to date, we will still have to observe best practice public health measures for a bit longer [wear that mask, watch that distance, wash those hands, avoid those crowds].

I also hope for a time when teachers and children are in classrooms and people of faith are in their sanctuaries, synagogues, and mosques. I hope for a time when all of our front line workers can do their jobs without wondering whether today is the day they become sick and fall ill or, God forbid, they infect and sicken a member of their family. I hope for a time when we can shake hands and hug without jeopardizing one another's health and well-being, when we can have a conversation in-person and not over a computer screen, when we can see all of one another's faces and especially each person's smiles.

I hope for more wisdom and less foolishness. I hope for more honesty and less deceit. I hope for more understanding and less judgment. I hope for more love and less hate. I hope for more unity and less division. I hope for more compassion and less cruelty. I hope for more peace and less war. I hope for more generosity and less greed. I hope for more togetherness and less isolation. I hope for more common good and less personal interest. I hope for more cooperation and less partisanship. I hope for more humility and less pride. I hope for more curiosity and less willful ignorance. I hope for more life and less death. And, I hope I have the courage to do my part and that you have the courage to do your part as well as we bear our hopes forward.

I can't begin to tell you how inspired I am and continue to be by our congregation's faithfulness – our Session, staff, volunteers, and members -- in a very challenging chapter of our nation's history. Our ministries and missions continued albeit in new and different ways. We learned anew that a church is people God uses to embody Christ in the world. And that's what we were doing before the pandemic, that's what we are doing during the pandemic, and that's what we will do after the pandemic.

As Christians, in our baptismal vows, we renounced sin and evil and its power in the world and confessed Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, pledging to be his follower, to obey him, and to show his love in the world. At the heart of our work, with God's help and the Spirit's guidance, is love of God and love of neighbor. We should get in the habit of asking this sort of question as individual Christians and as a church – how does [fill in the blank here] honor God and love neighbor? If we find ourselves having trouble answering the question, we may want to reconsider why we are doing it, what we are doing and how we are doing it.

Despite these bleak and dark mid-winter days, may your Christmas be merry and bright. May your new year be one filled with hope. Know that God loves you more than you can possibly imagine and loves everyone else that much, too. Remember, love is God's thing. We should make it ours, too.

Peace,

Dan McCoig