

A Requiem for 2020

As I have been saying in the past few weeks, today's service has the theme of a *Requiem for 2020*. As we have been through so much this year, it seemed a helpful idea to have a service where we speak the names of those we have lost, where we speak of the elements of life that we have lost, and to look forward in hope.

We will light 4 candles this morning. They are the Candle of Grief, the Candle of Strength, the Candle of Promise, and the Candle of Eternal Life.

The Candle of Grief – Dave

Compounding the loss that so many have experienced this year were the limitations that were placed on funeral and memorial services. We understand those limitations were necessary, but the result was that many families could not receive friends during a visitation and many people could not attend the service of their loved one. The first funeral I officiated after the beginning of the pandemic was a graveside service, limited to 10 people, including myself. As I conducted the service, a person held an iPad so that other family members could watch the service. I'm grateful they were able to see the service, but it was painful as well, knowing that so many could not be there in person. And in other services, to look out at a gathering of people who had to sit apart, which made it harder for them to comfort one another, and made the process of grief so much harder.

A passage that I read at many funerals is the 23rd psalm, which I will read at this time –

¹ The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

² He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

³ He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴ Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

⁵ Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

A number of people turned in names they wanted to add to the list of those lost in 2020. Here are the names we received –

All the patients I lost to Covid-19, many of whom I got to spend their last moments with,

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but some went without comfort

Gene Adams
Anna Harrod Albright
Auhmad Arbery
James Beach
Mary Ellen Beagle
Jo Ann Bishop
Carole Brown
Mark Chadwell
Betty Martin Chapman
Clyde Thomas Cloyd
Becky Martin Cobb
Ronnie DeWitt
Ralph Dunbar, Sr.
Sue Englebrecht
Carl Falk
George Floyd
Michael Foss
Don Frantz
Christine Gaddie
Kitty Harrod
Grant Hays
Brenda Henderson
Tom Hodge
June Jennings
Clint Kimbrough
Susannah Lindsay
Deanie Logan
Paige LuAllen
Cyndi McHolland
Danny Moffett
Rob Orkies
Teresa Perry
Rochelle Phillips
Roland Renegar
Burdetta Rossow
Sherrie Rothenberger
Glenn Rowlette

Tom Runyan
David Shelton
Barb Singleton
Essie Skaggs
Barbara Stivers
Jerry Stivers
Helen Harrod Stratton
Major “Eddie” Stratton
Donald Sturgeon
Breona Taylor
Lillian Taylor
Glenn “Stevie” Thomas
Trish Tindall
Rod Whitaker
Bill Willis
Martha Wilson
Paula Wilson
Tish Wilson

We light the Candle of Grief this morning, a reminder of the many losses we have shared, and as we light it, we turn to God for the needed and promised comfort (LIGHT CANDLE).

The Candle of Strength – Jordan

It was not only family, loved ones, and friends that we lost in 2020. We suffered many other losses as well. With so much loss, it is easy to believe we do not have the strength to continue. God promises, however, to provide the strength we need to continue, and we turn to Isaiah 40:1, 28-31 as a reminder of that promise.

¹ Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

²⁸ Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.

²⁹ He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.

³⁰ Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall;

³¹ but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Asking people to share what they have lost in 2020, we received these responses –

I grieve the lost opportunity in 2020 to help needy people because of the fear of Covid. I am praying the virus will soon be just a memory and I can reach out when needed.

That also includes being more involved with my church

Church camp

A lot of our mercy and kindness

Vacation Bible School

Trip to the Christian Appalachian Project

18 Sundays of worship services

The Wednesday evening fellowship meals were a great blessing, and I look forward to them resuming

The choir

Mary Lu Dempsey, and her loss of memory

I have missed having communion. I'm tired of my communion element substitutions.

Goldfish crackers just don't seem right.

I missed my loved one's funeral

My family could not take a vacation

Easter Sunday and all the activities

The Easter play

In-person Sunday School

I lost my job

The Easter sunrise service and breakfast

My kids have lost a year of school

Maundy Thursday

Not being able to visit in the hospitals or nursing homes

The warmth of a firm handshake or a friendly smile, or even a hug

Wednesday night potlucks

I did not get to go see my mom

Live praise band music filling the room

Smiles, handshakes, and hugs

Going out to eat with friends and family

Enjoying the fellowship at Easter breakfast

The Easter Sunrise service

I'm mourning the loss of time: time with friends, grandkids, church. Time we will never have again.

I did not get to visit with my family who live out of state

Visits with my 92-year-old dad who lives in a western Kentucky assisted living facility.

My only contact with him for nearly a year is emails and phone calls.

Physically being in church on Sunday.

Not being able to participate in many Outreach ministries because of new safe-health rules and regulations.

Monthly breakfasts with my sisters and four-hour car rides (one way) to visit our dad.

Family gatherings. There are nearly 40 of us. I haven't seen most since last Christmas.

Monthly lunches with college roommates.

Doing spontaneous activities. Now everything needs to be coordinated to ensure minimum contact with crowds.

I have lost far too much of my idealism, my hope, and my positive outlook.

We light the Candle of Strength this morning, a reminder that while the year has been so trying, God provides the strength we need (LIGHT CANDLE).

The Candle of Promise – Kathy Nichols

All of us have faced the difficulty of separation this year. We have been separated from our friends and loved ones, unable to visit with them, unable to share special events, unable to go out to dinner, and unable to shake someone's hand or enjoy a hug of greeting. We were not able to sit with those we love while they were hospitalized, and we could not hold their hand as they passed from this life to the next. We have so longed to be together, and to end the separations.

As Paul reminds us in Romans chapter 8, we are never separated from the care and the love of God. We will be able to gather again, the separations will end, and it will be a testimony to God's promise of us bringing together.

²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

³⁷ ...in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,

³⁹ *neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

We light the Candle of Promise this morning, a reminder that though we have been separated, the bond of God's love reminds us that we are never truly apart (LIGHT CANDLE).

The Candle of Eternal Life – Farrel Hill

The great hope that faith brings to us is that this life is not the end. There is more for us than just the brief time that we have in this temporal world. After our final breath in this life, we take our first breath in eternity. When we close our eyes in this life, we open our eyes to all the beauty of eternity. When we step from this life into the next, we enjoy the blessed reunion with those who have gone on before, where all is made new, and all grief comes to an end. As John writes in Revelation 21:1-7,

- ¹ *Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.*
- ² *I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.*
- ³ *And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.*
- ⁴ *‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”*
- ⁵ *He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”*
- ⁶ *He said to me: “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life.*
- ⁷ *Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children.*

We light the Candle of Eternal Life this morning, as a reminder death is not the end, and that God has the final word, and that word is life! (LIGHT CANDLE).

Message – Dave Charlton

Message Title – *Remember, Always Remember.*

Scripture Reading – Philippians 4:4-9

⁴ *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!*

⁵ *Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.*

⁶ *Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.*

⁷ *And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

⁸ *Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.*

⁹ *Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.*

As I watched a bit of the news the other morning, they were presenting a year in review. As it has been such a different year, the review was different as well; it was all bad news. Which can make one ask, *in 2020, is there any other kind of news?* Honestly, as I listened to the review, I was surprised at how many things I had forgotten about that took place this year. And all of them difficult. I kept saying to myself, *that was this year? I thought that was 2 or 3 years ago.* It was an impressively awful list, and all of it in one year!

We are here this morning, preparing to say goodbye to 2020, the year that is ending so different from how it began, and looking like the year that no one will miss. How could we miss a year with so much difficulty, and so much suffering?

The Scripture text I chose for this morning is one that fits perfectly for our time. Paul was writing in the midst of a truly awful time. He was a prisoner of Rome. His journey to Rome was one that was full of difficulty and hardship, and when he arrived, it did not get any better. There was no hope for his future, and by the time of writing he certainly knew the outcome that was ahead for him. And yet, in spite of everything, his writing is so full of joy and hope that his letter has become known as *the letter of joy*. How can such joy come from the midst of so much sorrow?

It is, for one, a matter of perspective. Paul says we should think about *whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things*. It's not always easy to think about the positives when you are in the middle of such difficulty, but if Paul could do it, then so can we. We can choose our perspective about this year, and about these circumstances. We can be bitter – and there is plenty that can make us bitter

– or we can be joyful. We can be angry – and there is plenty that can make us angry – or we can be grateful.

Paul says to *rejoice in the Lord always*. For good measure, he says it a second time – *I will say it again: Rejoice!* I believe Paul said it a second time because he knew he was writing to people who were at least somewhat skeptical of how anyone could rejoice in such a time. How can we be joyful in such a time as this? How can we be joyful when we have been unable to be with loved ones in the hospital, or the nursing home? How can we be joyful when we have been unable to gather with family for holidays and important occasions? How can we be joyful when we have missed so much, and lost so much? How can we be joyful when there seems so little about this year that brings us joy?

But somewhere down the road of time, maybe not for a while, but at some point, we will realize there were some things about this year that were not bad, but good. I think about an Easter that, while very different, held a lot of meaning. I will remember coming into the sanctuary on Easter morning, feeling bad about all the empty seats and canceled services and activities, and then I found the pictures and the messages that were taped to the chairs. That was a really comforting and uplifting moment, and it will be an Easter memory that I will never forget. I will remember that, while so much was canceled, I was home more in the evenings than I had been in a long time. I was home with my family more than I had been in a long time, and for that, I am very grateful. As we moved toward the end of the year, I had a feeling of dread over what we all knew would be a very different Advent and Christmas season. It was different, yes, but it was also calmer, more hopeful, and touching in a way that it had not been for some time, to me, and I imagine to you as well. It was an Advent when we feared we could not have what we were accustomed to having, such as a Christmas play. But with some creativity and ingenuity, we pulled it off, and in the Christmas's to come we will say, *remember the year when the play was mostly by video, and we had to organize by family groups, and very little of it was live? And how so much could have gone wrong, but didn't? Remember how it worked really well? Remember that?* And though our attendance has been so diminished by the pandemic, the livestream has increased the reach of our worship service. Our Christmas Eve service has now been viewed more than 1,400 times on Facebook.

And we will always, of course, remember those whom we have lost. We will mourn those losses for all of our days, but as we look back on those friends, and those loved ones, we will also look forward in hope, holding to the promise that we will see them again. And we will then hold more closely, and more hopefully, to those words of Paul, *and the God of peace will be with you*. May God's peace be with us, today, tomorrow, and all days.

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