

Column

People wax nostalgic all the time. After all, no matter how difficult a situation, once it is past, you know you've got through it. The element of fear has been extracted, and you are free to remember good things that happened along the way.

With that said, I doubt many have nostalgic feelings as they look back to the Covid years now thankfully past. After all, the pandemic, whatever your theory of its source (the President at the time dubbed it the Chinese flu) produced unprecedented hardships for millions of Americans and indeed for people around the world. Many lost one or more loved ones. Others lost income and even their homes. Social isolation had a negative effect on people in nursing homes and other care facilities. Children, especially those on the margin, lost ground in terms of education. Mandated masks and later vaccinations created distrust in the government and pharmaceutical companies, which is ongoing.

Meanwhile, in the area of religion, many houses of worship closed and remained closed to in-person worship for more than a year. Once they were opened far fewer came back. Some closed their doors for good.

Not much to be nostalgic about, but there were some bright spots. In many places, neighbors checked on neighbors. There were grocery store runs for the elderly, shut-ins and the extremely venerable. Forced seclusion caused one man I know to begin reading his Bible in earnest and as result to have a personal encounter with the Saviour. Health care workers and others that worked for the common good gained a new respect from the general public. No longer were they taken for granted.

In my case, I remember several times a month driving to the next county over – Union – and picking up a Cuban sandwich and some black beans outside Nani's Restaurant. On the way back, I would stop at a country church with a pavilion. There, in solitude and quiet, I would eat

my food and read a newspaper in the company of birds and the dead (the church was surrounded by graves). It was rather nice.

I also remember ‘drive-in’ church. Our church never suspended in-person worship, but we did do what we could to ensure that those who attended were safe. A table altar and lectern were set up on the front porch of the church, with people staying in their cars listening over their FM radios. Recently, I looked at some old YouTube videos. As I spoke, birds in the rhododendrons beside me chirped. After the sermon, Communion, safely packaged, was taken to those in their vehicles.

As an added benefit, people were able to bring their dogs. Prior to service, I would go round with treats and was able to get to know everyone’s canine family members. One dog by the name of Trudy was especially attentive to my sermons. Her family said that when I began speaking, she would sit up on the back seat with ears up and would remain in that position throughout the sermon . . . would that my human congregants were so eager and attentive!

Would I want to go back? No. Do I long for another pandemic so I could hear birds singing while I preach? Certainly not. Nostalgic? No, but . . .

Perhaps Paul’s words in 1 Thessalonians 5:18 best describe what our response ought to be as we look back in general but especially as we remember serendipities: “In every thing give thanks.”

ALMIGHTY and most merciful God, grant, we beseech thee, that by the indwelling of thy Holy Spirit, we may be enlightened and strengthened for thy service [whatever the times or situation]; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee in the unity of the same Spirit ever, one God, world without end. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer)

The Rev. Victor H. Morgan is rector of St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Blue Ridge.