

Column

With the beginning of May, it will be 20 years that I have been writing this column, which is now read not only in the *Blue Ridge News Observer*, but in the *Ellijay Times Courier* and in at least one church magazine in England. Fifty-two times 20 is a lot of weeks, yet it has and continues to a good ride.

I should like to take this opportunity thank you my faithful readers for being there, and especially those of you who have contacted me over the years to say that you have found this or that thought helpful. You make this endeavour worthwhile.

Today I am thinking about what has changed and what has not changed since I wrote my first column in May 1998. Let's begin with what has changed.

The most notable change has been the way copy is transmitted. In the early years, I would physically carry it to newspaper office or fax it. When overseas or even in another city in this country, getting the copy to the publisher could at times be a challenge. On more than one occasion I remember taking a stack of handwritten pages to the concierge desk at a hotel asking the one on duty to fax these pages to a list of telephone numbers.

In those days, the Internet was just beginning to come into its own, and not all hotels or even all newspapers had this capability. Nor did you travel with your laptop as most computers then were desk units with a tower. So, the trusty yellow legal pad, on occasion, had to be used.

Another thing that has changed over the past 20 years is the general atmosphere of American society. In 1998, most people in this country were in a state of innocence and optimism. When I wrote my first column, the hype and fear generated by Y2K was a few months off, and certainly no one could have imagined anything as catastrophic as the Twin Towers in NYC being flattened by commercial aircraft turned missiles.

Even when signs began appearing that all was not right, I don't think we recognised these signs. For example, when on April 20, 1999, a shooting occurred at Columbine High School in Colorado few people imagined such shootings would become common-place occurrences over the next two decades. As horrible as this incident was, it was viewed as a tragic anomaly. But, now we know, to adapt a line from Dylan Thomas, "times were a-changing".

A number of things have changed since I began writing this column, but I am glad to say more have stayed the same. What are some of these?

To begin with, people's need or hunger for something or Someone outside oneself has not changed. Words of St. Augustine of Hippo still hold: "Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee."

Likewise, the truthfulness and trustworthiness of God's Word Written remains in force. In times of confusion, we can still say with the Psalmist: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105).

And then thirdly and finally, God's promise of forgiveness and a new start remains in force. The World at large wants to shred and incinerate those who mess up (just watch the news on television any night). The God revealed in Jesus, meanwhile, wants to heal and restore. His arms remain outstretched and His invitation continues to go forth: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

Twenty years later we find ourselves in a new world but thankfully with the same God. From Him, may we draw instruction from the past, help for the present and hope for the future.

O ALMIGHTY God, who alone canst order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men; Grant unto thy people, that they may love the thing which thou commandest, and desire that which thou dost promise; that so, among the sundry and manifold changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed, where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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