



The best and worst of times

'A Tale of Two Cities,' by Charles Dickens, opens with this line: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair." Sounds a lot like the year we just passed through. Some even say that 2020 was the worst year ever, due to a deadly pandemic, political corruption, violent protesters, media deception, the silencing of free speech, and the end of reasonable debate.



ASK THE PASTOR

By Pastor Scott DENHAM

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Beyond these issues, what determined our experience—whether good or bad—was not the external hysteria, but the internal condition of our hearts. By-and-large, our societal disruptions did not create our problems but revealed them. The angry heart gave full vent to its rage. Isolating together forced relation problems to the surface. However, the loving heart sought avenues of service, support, and kindness. And the heart of faith found solace in the Lord, delved deeper into the knowledge of God, and pursued love and compassion for others.

It is easy to talk about all that went wrong with this past year—especially true of those tragic losses of loved ones who succumb to Covid-19. Beyond these personal misfortunes, I want to pause to highlight why the year 2020 held many valuable lessons for us.

First off, the events of the year 2020 exposed our self-sufficiency to reveal our need for God. We may think that we are masters of our fate but any one of this year's problems shows how little we control. 2020 is the best year ever for those who learned to rely upon God in everything.

Secondly, Coronavirus slowed the pace of life, eliminated many distractions, and made God feel closer. Consider the effects of quarantine and isolation on a busy and on-the-go people. At first, staying at home drove us crazy, but also helped cultivate a quiet spirit for drawing near to God (Jas 4:8).

Finally, couples and families isolating together found an opportunity to strengthen the ties that bind and to enjoy being together. Those living alone now know this is unhealthy and need to make a change (Gen 2:18; Ecc 4:9).

So was 2020 "the best of times" or "the worst of times?" It depends.

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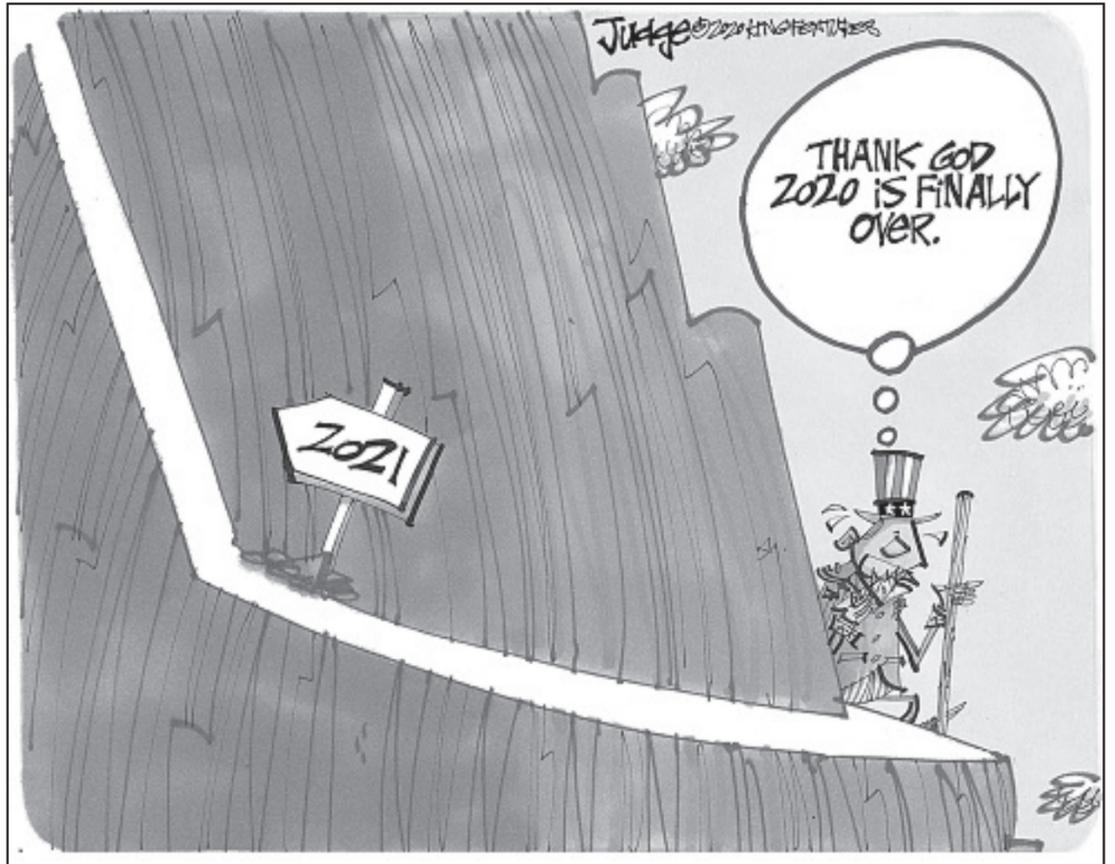
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Letters Policy

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Legislation shows fluid nature of national politics

Mark Twain sent a telegram from London to the New York Journal in 1897 explaining the reports of his death had been exaggerated after rumors surfaced the famous writer was dead or at least seriously ill.

The same held true last week regarding a piece of legislation to rename the post office in Clarinda. As a result, I had my first taste of the fluid nature of reporting on national politics since facts can turn 180 degrees in only a few hours.

As a bit of background, Rep. Cindy Axne authored a bill she unveiled in Clarinda in July to designate the local post office the Jessie Field Shambaugh Postal Building in honor of the former educated and Page County School Superintendent regarded as the "Mother of 4-H." The bill passed both the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate in December and was sent to the President to be signed into law.

However, at 9:30 a.m. Tuesday, Jan. 5, I was notified by Axne's office the bill had not been signed Monday night and had died. This meant the bill would have to be reintroduced and again passed by Congress.

The timing of this notification created a rare dilemma because our press deadline is noon on Tuesday. I had to determine if the announcement was newsworthy enough to be included in that week's edition, how quickly the story could be written and if I could change the design of the front page and the page the story would conclude on prior to deadline. Allowing for time to finalize the pages and electronically move them to the printer, I had two hours to work with.

Since I had been covering the status of the bill since July, I determined the story was worth inclusion in the paper and may be "old news" a week from then. Since I had prior stories on the bill available to pull information from, I



KENT'S KOMMENTS

By Kent Dinnebler

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was confident the story could be written fairly quickly and I had a plan on how to adjust the design of the pages.

Therefore, I set about my tasks and successfully included the article in the Jan. 7 edition of the Clarinda Herald-Journal. Given the local interest of the story, it was also included in the Jan. 6 edition of the Valley News Today.

I was pleased we were able to share this information with our readers in such a timely fashion. That was, until my phone rang at 9:30 a.m. Wednesday morning. An official with Axne's office explained to me they had been misinformed about the deadline for signing the bill. The bill was still eligible for approval Tuesday night and had in fact been signed by the President that night.

After receiving an explanation of the misinformation Axne's office had received Tuesday morning regarding the bill, I wrote a revised story clarifying the status of the bill that was placed on our website and a link to that story was shared on Facebook. However, since the Clarinda Herald-Journal had already been published, there was nothing I could do correct the story that appeared on the front page of the Jan. 7 edition.

Similarly, the Jan. 6 edition of the Shenandoah Valley News had been published with the story about the bill not being signed. The Shenandoah Valley News ran a corrected story explaining the unfortunate circumstances that

transpired in its Jan. 9 edition and an updated version of the story confirming the signing appears in today's Clarinda Herald-Journal.

In my 27 year career, this was the first time I knew an article that appeared in our paper was incorrect. However, there is no one to blame for the article that appeared last week. The staff with Axne's office relayed the facts as they knew them Tuesday morning about the bill and I reported those facts. When those facts changed, everyone involved took immediate action inform our readers, and the public in general, of those changes.

It was simply a matter of unfortunate timing. Had the reports been received Monday and Tuesday, the corrected information could have been presented last week. If the initial report had been received Tuesday afternoon, that version of the story would not have made it to print.

I love movies and there are several excellent ones that show the work of newspapers. Some of the best known movies are All the President's Men, The Paper and Spotlight. There is a scene in The Paper with a staff meeting where the legitimacy of an arrest is being debated. If proof the suspects are innocent is not available by press time, it is decided the original story of the arrest will run and the paper will correct the information the next day.

"We taint 'em today and make 'em look good on Saturday. Everybody is happy," the character played by Glenn Close says.

I never liked that idea and believe journalists should strive to do better if at all possible. However, in an environment like we have today where news can change in a heartbeat, I have a better understanding of why she said that. I still don't like it, but sometimes you have to go with what you know at the time.

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