

The Dispatch

December 2020: Memory, Hope and the Living Present

An old hymn "[Not Alone for Mighty Empire](#)", beloved by many, has the following words that capture our imagination: "*Standing in the living present, memory and hope between.*" That is, we are situated in life between memories, vivid or fading; and a hope that is vibrant or faint. We are in the "living present" of December 2020. We decided for this Christmas issue of the *Dispatch* to present essays on "memory," "living present," and "hope," and encourage you to spend some time thinking about each in this Holiday season. We invite your response.

"Memory"

Dr. Bill Long

I finally did it; I hung a portrait in my living room that I inherited from my mother, who had inherited it from her mother.....and which goes back 163 years to 1857. It is the oldest family artifact we have. This portrait, which is technically known as a "hand-coloring of a photograph," goes back nearly to the earliest days of photography in America. Many examples of hand-coloring of photographs are available online.

The subject matter of this painting/photograph only matters to me and my family. It is a portrait of David Lynch, two years old in the picture, in his baptismal gown. Most people mistake the child for a girl because of the gown, but it is a boy. David was the older brother of my great-grandfather Albert Lynch. David was born in 1855. A portrait picture was taken of him two years later. Then, when a wave of diphtheria rushed through town, he suddenly died. In their grief, my great-great grandparents had the picture hand-colored. The result is this priceless and timeless painting of a two year-old boy. Little David Lynch is now looking downward on me from his perch above my couch. The picture is dated 1857.

Little David is long gone, but he has accompanied my family now through five generations. When I saw a 1930's photograph of my great-grandparents around their dining room table of their home in Connecticut, I was stunned to see the picture of little David above them, gently peering down on the family. When I was growing up, little David sat above my grandparents' dining room table. Then, my mother placed it prominently in our house. Now, I am the privileged owner of the picture.

My great grand-uncle David perhaps said few words in his life, but his silent presence with us for five generations speaks louder than any speech he ever could have given.

The "Living Present"

Davon Cook

I had Covid the entire week of Thanksgiving. I was never in serious condition and realize what a blessing that was. I was just sick enough to be miserable and whiny. But, perhaps more difficult than the physical illness was the emotional impact of isolation. For eight days I mostly stayed isolated in rooms by myself, trying to not infect my family. It was stunning how fast I became depressed--hearing them playing games or having meals without me, amplified by holiday week where they had a lot of down time together. I felt a bit abandoned by friends who were also busy with the holiday. I missed simple human touch of a hug or just sitting near someone. I wasn't allowed in the kitchen for eight days. Now, I would have expected to *love* having someone prepare all my food for me! Rather, I missed those simple daily tasks that make us feel "normal".

I share this story not to elicit sympathy; rather I have perspective now from the experience. Since Covid began, I

had empathy for elderly isolated in care facilities. However, I realize my empathy was a bit *theoretical*. Now that I've had a small taste of it first hand, my empathy is *genuine*!

That leads me to consider how much impact we can have with intentional outreach to those around us who are isolated—Covid-times or not. Beyond the elderly who live alone, the list is broader than that: cancer patients isolated after treatment to prevent infection (and their families); those isolated by life circumstances—job hours, addiction, family troubles, divorce, scandal; those isolated by personality—who just aren't good at forging relationships easily; and so forth. The impact of a text, a visit, a call, a touch can be profound.

So in this holiday season, my New Year's Resolution is to pay attention, to make more time for the simple, yet profound, interactions that resonate.

"Hope"

Lance Woodbury

Several business coaching resources I follow, when addressing the future, pose this question: "What would make next year your best year ever?" The idea is that your expressed hope for next year exceeds of all prior years' successes. And in most years, typical answers focus on business valuations, revenue or net income, customer growth or marketing reach, staff development or professional growth.

But what happens when the prior year is an anomaly? When the year went so differently, for so many? When the metrics of yesterday feel not-quite-right for the near-term future? How does the pandemic year inform our hope for tomorrow?

The theologian [Eugene Peterson](#) describes [hope](#) as "Imagination put in the harness of faith." And as I think about imagination and faith in terms of next year, my hope turns to a different set of metrics.

The ability to maintain meaningful relationships with family and friends. We've had to do it differently, and have simultaneously disliked and appreciated the technology that helps us connect with others. In the future I hope to invest in, and not take for granted, the relationships that nourish.

Demonstrating gratitude to those who care for us. From first responders, nurses and doctors to teachers, counselors, and ministers; grocery, retail and restaurant workers, delivery drivers, airport workers and trash truck drivers, airline workers, farmers, ranchers, meat packing workers...so many people are in the business of caring for us. In the future I hope to increase my demonstration of gratitude for their service.

Nurturing my spiritual life. Regardless of faith or denomination, many people are sorely missing worship in community. For many of us, Christmas Day or Eve will include a virtual service, but we long for the chance to engage more of our senses and connect with others in the sharing of joy and praise. In the future I hope to find more ways to nurture my spirit and the spirits of others.

Indeed, as I turn toward next year, the hope for my "best year ever" looks much more meaningful.