

Letter 59, Wednesday, May 12, 2021

Dear Choir,

I do enjoy writing these letters. It gives me a chance to think about all of you and the fun we used to have back in that old year, 2020. You remember that year, don't you? It was the year of the great pandemic, Covid 19 and all of that. We all huddled in our houses, afraid to go out or to let anyone in. Reality as we knew it stopped. We all gathered around our computers and did as much as we could to make life seem somehow normal. And then, suddenly, it was.

All of those things that had seemed so strange in the beginning became sort of normalized. We got used to them. Children went to school virtually. People did their jobs virtually. Families stayed together as much as they possibly could...virtually. There were virtual church meetings, virtual happy hours, virtual games, and we all stayed six feet apart.

And the masks! They were horrible. They fastened around our ears and covered from our chins to our noses. They were okay for short periods (like a minute), but the longer stretches in those things seemed like forever. And then, it didn't. We (most of us) got used to wearing them. We got creative with them. People wore masks that made their faces look like those of animals. Ladies tried wearing masks that matched their outfits. We put sayings on them. We put athletic team logos on them. But, the most amazing thing was that we sort of got used to them. Now it almost feels strange to me when I don't have one with me. I feel like something's missing. I may carry one in my pocket for the rest of my life, kind of like a favorite Teddy bear.

We found out that there were things about the persons we were huddled with that we really hadn't noticed before. Did he always clear his throat that much? I don't remember her sniffing every other second. Stop tapping your fingers! If you chew one more ice cube, you're a dead man. But, there were sweet things, too. We realized, truly, how much we needed one another and truly loved one another. Still...one more ice cube and.....

We were lucky if we were secluded with someone who shared our tastes in entertainment. Thank god we have two television sets, or there might have been nothing left but blood and bone in front of a TV screen. "Why do you watch so many cooking shows? You never cook anything you see there. You have never made even one orange-cranberry scone." "You shouldn't complain. You watch at least six shows a day and they all have the same stupid plot and the same characters. Only the names have been changed....to protect the careers of those who had any part in making one of them. I don't know how you do it. I know 'who done it' in the first five minutes of every one of your shows." And so it went for a whole year....without one damn scone!

And, though we complained, we were lucky that we could huddle. We invented a whole new group of people: the essential workers. Those were the people we absolutely could not function without, and who had to go out into the cold (or hot) cruel world, so that the rest of us could remain relatively safe. I don't think I actually had ever taken them for granted, but I

certainly have learned to appreciate them a whole lot more. I think I appreciate absolutely everyone a whole lot more.

And, of course, people got sick...and people died. For the most part they were people we didn't know, and could only mourn as a part of a number, or perhaps a part of a far away family who we would never know, but with whom we could identify and somehow imagine the grief they might be experiencing. But some of them were us; family members, close friends, high school buddies we hadn't seen in years, but still loved, church members...people we will miss forever.

And then, vaccines!!!! Life could be lived again. We could take off those awful masks. We could hug again. We could go out again. It was only a matter of time before life would be normal again...except that some people refused to be vaccinated. What? We have a way to defeat this thing and some people for whatever reason refuse to do that? Of course, they might be afraid, but... My mind goes blank at that point. I have no thoughts about that. I can't think about that. I can find no reason for that. You have a chance to become immune to a terrible disease, and you refuse? A big truck is headed for you, and you decide to take your chances remaining in the road, when all you would have to do to save yourself is to take a step one way or the other? We could all be so happy. We could all be so safe. Covid could be, if not defeated completely, close to it. And we seem helpless to do anything about this problem.

I do not want to make this a downer. We are on our way back to the abnormal lives we were living prior to Covid 19. Even though strains of it continue to cause horrible pain throughout parts of the world, I have to hope that the vaccines will eventually win out, and humanity will have averted yet another attempt to wipe it out. We need to pull together and tame this thing, to bring it down. We know now that it's possible, and we need to hurry because we have so many other things to deal with, waiting on the horizon.

On to climate change!!!

Love you all, Forrest