

Dear Family and Close Personal Friends,

In the world “Before Covid,” “20/20” used to refer to normal vision. Now and ever after, “2020” will remind us of the year that became a blur. In January we heard that there was a new disease in China and had no idea what it was going to mean for us.

So, what did it mean? The illusion of unbroken progress came to a screeching halt. The confidence that human ingenuity can solve anything was shaken, but not abandoned, as a global pandemic swept the world including the US. The “what if” thinkers seemed to indicate that if we had different leaders, all would have been well. Then the police killing of George Floyd followed by legitimate protests that were hijacked by looters, arsonists and anarchists, reminded us that we had not yet solved the problem of human nature. This upheaval took place in the neighborhoods where both Ross and Karin grew up. City Council members insisted that defunding the police would solve the problems and an outbreak of crime along with a demoralized police force has clearly supplied the answer, although it is still not acknowledged.

What should we do? The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy to pray “for kings, and for all that are in authority,” which in his day included Caesar. Also, the LORD said, “If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” Can those of us who consider ourselves “His people” apply the “humble,” the “seek” and the “turn” parts? The LORD said to Isaiah, “I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit.”

Much has been lost, but not our dependence on the One who made us, redeemed us and will ultimately reign over a restored new heaven and new earth. And because that is true, we have not lost our joy or our sense of humor. We have read the back of the book and know that God wins, so we can live confidently, regardless of the short-term circumstances.



Fifty years ago, on a hot July 11th, Ross and Karin were married. This was to be the year for a big celebration that would include most of the wedding party, including the pastor, Rev. Bruce Chapman. Maybe it will happen in 2021, but two of the attendants are already gone from this world. Do they celebrate anniversaries in heaven?

Our kids and grandkids? They are wonderful -- just like yours! The pandemic has cut back on the sports, music and dance, but they continue to excel remotely and virtually. They take one day at a time, recognizing time as a gift and acknowledging their responsibility to use all their gifts in the service of the One Who gave them. You will have to check your newspapers for academy

awards, Nobel prizes, patents and world records. Space and humility prevent full elucidation of the complete stories.

Us old folks? We have now lived for 6 years in Gramercy Park, an independent-living senior co-operative. Basically we are warehoused seniors – the highest-risk demographic for the pandemic. We both had mild viral symptoms in early March before Covid had been diagnosed in Minnesota, but after Ross had been in public crowds with the granddaughters. We self-isolated without being able to confirm the diagnosis because it was during the time when testing was only available for people who were headed to the hospital. Among our Gramercy neighbors over the

year there have been 14 confirmed cases and one death. Karin lost two cousins, not from Covid. That all has been a sobering reminder of a fact we like to ignore. Life is fragile.

Karin started the year with foot surgery. She healed very well after 6 weeks of non-weight-bearing. Her hands and brain were and are very busy regardless. She has done embroidery and made quilts for the grandchildren. She has sorted photos, annotated them and put them in albums for the grandkids, starting with the year 1996 and is currently up to 2004. Karin made a promise to Ross years ago that she will not die before the albums are done. Card-making from recycled materials, designed by Karin and assembled by a team of artistic ladies in our building, continues at a record pace. These are provided as a service to our neighbors for a bargain price of \$1.00. This is Karin's regular creative outlet. She enjoys sending handwritten notes of encouragement and has finally learned to text the grandchildren and others. In person Sunday School teaching has been interrupted by Covid. She made several video lessons in the spring, but missed hugging the kids.

Karin has led Bible Studies for years and helps with a Gramercy Women's Bible Study and also with a small-group study made up of people from church. She is also a Mentor Mom for the MOPS group at our church. She has been spending time reading, praying and journaling and has had an amazing opportunity to be an English language conversational partner with a college freshman in Beijing China, using WeChat. She has picked up her piano playing and doing well although not ready for Carnegie Hall.

Ross has used the extra time for reading books — Kindle versions because they are cheaper and more portable. He has for years been writing Biblical monologues, essentially attempting to get inside some of the characters portrayed in the Bible. There has been a burst of activity and he now has over 114, many with discussion questions. They are available on www.rossolson.org. Some of Ross' previous responsibilities have been taken away, like Outpost Ministries Board and teaching junior church. But he participates in two men's groups, teaching one of them. He is the ZOOM host for TCCSA monthly meetings and chairs the Health and Wellness Committee at Gramercy. There he is up to his old tricks of causing trouble by questioning authority and challenging censorship. He continues to do "Papa Day" every Wednesday with the remaining available home-schooled grandchildren. Presently that group is down to just 10 year old Clara! She suggested that Grandma be added to the mix when she is free. When Grandma asked "Why?" Clara said, "Because you add flavor." Does this mean Grandpa is bland? Clara obviously enjoys being an "only."

How many more Christmases will there be? For us? For everybody? Oh, this pandemic will undoubtedly pass, but with it comes the opportunity for all of us to evaluate our lives. God gives us chances to remember that we did not create ourselves and that we need to consult our Maker to find out — or review — our purpose and responsibilities. It is interesting that with a death in the building, the wall of censorship briefly lifted, just as it did after September 11, 2001. 2020 has been a year with a message and we should not miss it, ignore it or waste it.

Jesus, Who created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them, fashioned the first man and woman, both in His image. Amazingly, at Christmas, He became a human baby. He did it in order to live a perfect life, suffer and die to pay the penalty for our rebellion by His death on the cross. Forgiveness is available for those who acknowledge their sin and accept His wonderful free gift of salvation that begins immediately and continues for all eternity.

Joyfully yours,

Ross and Karin Olson

