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Pastor's Reflections

The Glad Game

I love the Disney movie "Pollyanna." It's about a plucky orphaned girl who plays what she calls "the Glad Game." She finds something to be glad about in every circumstance, no matter how difficult. Since we all have a pretty good idea what was bad about 2020, I was thinking that before we say goodbye we could ask ourselves what might have been good about it.



Hayley Mills as Pollyanna

We found out we need human contact. If we didn't value being in the same room with friends or family, or the simple pleasure of shaking hands with someone we just met, we do now. We found we wanted to know how people were really doing, if they were really OK. That's a good thing.

We found out some things about ourselves. As with any kind of challenge, I believe we now know more about who we are, what we can do best, also about our limitations and what we're not so good at doing. Self-awareness leads to growth. That's a good thing as well.

We found out some things about others. Many people are more caring than we'd first supposed. They reach out, they encourage. A nice surprise!

Speaking for myself, I now have greater respect for our church staff. They have had to adapt not once, not twice, but a great many times to the ever changing circumstances in which we find ourselves. And I am just as impressed by our volunteers, who had to think differently and organize differently in order to get the mission accomplished. They had to take on leadership roles they didn't expect. They had to participate in group decision making and be open to the ideas of others even if at first they didn't make sense. I likewise appreciated how they challenged my own thinking from time to time. I'm glad I got to experience all that.

Of course, the "Glad Game" has its limits, even for Pollyanna. Here at church, almost every ministry has suffered to some extent. And I'm sure we lost some of our connectedness no matter how hard we tried to keep in touch. Then we must face that fact that people we know and love had to suffer through Covid or some other illness and not have access to family and friends – so tragic. Same with postponing funerals. Just terrible.

But I think we can be genuinely glad of one more thing. I believe I speak for many of us when I say God seemed to show up over and over for us this past year. We found our prayers were more meaningful to us, more deeply felt. And Jesus – his words, his example, his love – he just seemed more real.

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Here's a song by Andrea Crouch, a 20th century African American singer and composer. He had his own struggles, and died too young, but left us with this perspective on life:

*I've had many tears and sorrows
I've had questions for tomorrow
There's been times I didn't know right from wrong
But in every situation, God gave me blessed consolation
That my trials come to only make me strong
Through it all, through it all
I've learned to trust in Jesus, I've learned to trust in God ...*

May our trust in God continue on into this coming year.

Peace, John Wagner



Music and Worship Notes by Mary Ellen Clinard

Santa's Marching Band

Several years ago I bought something to add to my Christmas decorations. It was called "Santa's Marching Band" and consisted of four Santas about 5 inches tall and each holding a bell in one hand and a stick to strike it with in the other. I don't normally notice this type of Christmas decoration but for a moment in passing, but what caught my eye was how these Santas would strike their bells to accompany the sounds of 35 Christmas Carols that could be heard coming from the big drum in the center. Well, that year, and several years after that, I just got too busy and never took it out of the box. This year I had more time, found it on the shelf, and set it up. There was something just so pure and joyous about the sound it made and I looked forward to hearing all 35 carols as I was working around the house that afternoon.

After about a dozen songs that had put me in a Christmas mood, the Santa Band started to play "Amazing Grace". WHAT?!? I was thrown out of my current reverie and rather irritated, I thought... "Why did they throw 'Amazing Grace' in there? It's not a Christmas song! Good grief." But later I began to think about it. Amazing Grace IS a Christmas song! It's probably the ultimate Christmas song. It's not about a baby in a manger, or a cold winter's



night, or shepherds, but it gets down to the very essence of Christmas. God's grace. God sent Jesus to earth to make it possible that we have eternal life through His grace. Christmas was the very beginning of Grace!

As we move from Christmas into Epiphany, we can take a look at what some of the carols we sang this season said about grace:

- ◆ In "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" we find "*..and ransom captive Israel*" and "*... the captives from their prison free, and conquer death's deep misery*".
- ◆ In "Lo, How A Rose E'er Blooming", we find "*... from sin and death now save us..*" and in "Good Christian Friends, Rejoice" we sing "*... now ye need not fear the grave, Jesus Christ was born to save...*"
- ◆ "O Little Town of Bethlehem" announces, "*... cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today.*" and in "Silent Night" we quietly proclaim "*..with the dawn of redeeming grace...*"
- ◆ In "Hark the Herald Angels Sing" it plainly states, "*..born that we no more may die, born to raise us from the earth, born to give us second birth.*"

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An update from Dr. Les and Debbie Dornon, missionaries to Nepal working in the Tansen Hospital

Hope for a New Year

Happy 2021! I know we all have high hopes for a better year — but it is good to remember we have the most certain hope of all in Jesus!

Many of you know that we made a quick decision to travel to the U.S. in mid-December for a visit. We had missed out on two previously planned trips due to Covid and work needs in Nepal. However, on Nov. 22, when our work permits ran out, we were forced to stay home and not able to do our jobs. When it became apparent that this wasn't going to be solved quickly, we took advantage of the ticket offer we had and flew to the U.S. While I write this, we are self isolating at home and plan to drive to Michigan on Dec 24 to be with the grandkids for Christmas.

We are saddened by the losses of this past year — so many plans and dreams were thwarted, and so many lost loved ones. We are thankful for the hopes of the vaccine and mostly for the hope that we have in Christ — knowing that we can trust in Him and that He is in control!

We pray that by the time this is published, our work permits will have been sorted out with the Nepali government and we will be able to return again to serve the still very needy people of Nepal.

We heard the story recently of a patient who came to Tansen hospital after having been injured in a landslide. He was making his way back to his village after a

meeting, and had to climb over a mudslide using hands and knees. However, because one of his legs had been previously weakened by polio, when a rock came falling down, he was unable to get out of the way quickly enough, and his good leg was crushed. He had to travel for 18 hours to make it to our hospital, but fortunately for him, our great team of orthopedic surgeons was ready to help. He was operated on and got an IM nail-ing done. He healed well and is once again able to walk. Since he is supporting his disabled father and younger sister, this is really important. He is struggling now because his job as a teacher stopped during the lockdown, so he hasn't been getting paid. Thankfully, many schools are starting to open again, at least for a few hours a day, so this should help. If our hospital hadn't been open to this man, he would have faced having to live with a twisted and painful leg injury for the rest of his life. Getting the operation that he had at other hospitals in Nepal would have been 3 times the cost— so he wouldn't have been able to pay. Even at our hospital, the cost was too much, but because of the funds from overseas to help poor patients, he was able to be helped.

Thank you so much, even in the difficult year of 2020, for your support and prayers for Tansen hospital and our work there in Nepal. You have helped make a hard year better for many, many people. Thank you!

Happy New Year to you all!

Love, देबी (Debbie) and लेस (Les)

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So yes, whether or not they realized it, the makers of “Santa’s Marching Band” added an unexpected Christmas carol to their list of songs! Who was the person who decided which songs to add and which to leave out? Maybe it was a true believer who despite the traditional favorites, found a way to make us actually THINK about the true meaning of Christmas this year!

If you want more Christmas carol/Amazing Grace fun, try singing the words to “Amazing Grace” to the tune of “Joy

to the World” (repeat the last phrase of Amazing Grace just like the repeated phrases in Joy to the World) or to the tune of “It Came Upon A Midnight Clear” (you can get 2 verses of Amazing Grace into 1 verse of the music!) Yet another musical connection between our traditional Christmas carols and this favorite hymn. We may want to try these out next year at Christmas!

**The January First Friday Concert
is canceled.**

January Birthdays

6 Betsy Koval, Mary Lou Williams

9 Glenna Combs

10 Dave Kramer, Chris Urso

12 Bob Beagle

13 Kathy Hieber

16 John Andrews

18 Jim Hogg

19 James Irwin, Eric Taylor

22 Pat Schaefer

24 Greg Caudill

25 James Thomas Irwin, Phyllis Lolli

26 Alex Mills

28 Wilma Mucha

29 Judy Andrews

30 Shelby Grace Rutledge, Carolyn Tucker

31 Dixie Davis, Ronald Jones

Happy Birthday!

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