

## Life in the Time of Covid, 2020-2022

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2019 had been a tough year for my wife Jane and me. It included the loss of her mother and my father. We were hoping for a better year.

My most vivid memories of the beginning of the pandemic are from St. John's: worried faces; a bottle of hand sanitizer at communion; a wonderful Lenten sermon by our member Erik Lindell. He is a pilot. He spoke of the beautiful northern lights he saw as he flew, and the predictions of decreased air travel.

Jane and I were in early retirement, and we were planning a trip to Greece with St. Olaf that spring. We were disappointed when it was canceled, but that seemed trivial when compared with the images of hospitalizations and deaths we were seeing from China and Italy.

Until recently, I did almost all our grocery shopping. In the early part of the pandemic I would typically go once a week early in the morning. I would shop as quickly as I could, and try not to talk to the workers. I appreciated the risks they were taking to keep people fed. I am an introverted person, but those months were too isolating even for me. I can imagine how hard they were for extroverted people. There were grocery shortages. I remember especially hand sanitizer, and oddly, yeast. I guess many people were baking. I baked bread with a small amount of yeast and long rises.

At the beginning of the pandemic it was unclear how the virus spread. I would wipe groceries and Amazon purchases with rubbing alcohol. As it became clearer that the primary spread of the virus was by aerosol, Jane and I would take day trips to state parks. Sometimes the trails were crowded, and we wondered if this was a good idea. Like many others, we became enthusiastic bird watchers. We went cross country skiing. As we realized that hotels were not very dangerous, we did car trips, both to southwestern and northeastern states. I like driving, and Jane would read interesting passages from the books she was reading.

2020 and 2021 were politically polarized and angry. People were working and living online, and a vicious cycle of online and "real world" anger emerged, each feeding off the other. I looked for less toxic corners of the internet, and tried to avoid the news as much as I could. I found comfort in scripture and prayer. I read poetry and science fiction and reread my favorite novel, *Moby Dick*. I enjoyed the tasks of everyday life; cooking, various repairs, snow blowing, burning a brush pile.

There were hopes and disappointments. We were so excited to get our vaccinations in the spring of 2021 and ate at the Ole Store to celebrate. We had appreciated St. John's online worship services and the outdoor communion services at the Welbaum farm. It was wonderful to resume in-person worship at St. John's in the summer of 2021. But the emergence of variants and reimposition of mask mandates were disappointing. We received our boosters as soon as we could, and just recently received our second boosters. It appears that getting Covid boosters may become as routine as flu shots.

I was a child in Florida during the Cuban missile crisis. I remember our class practicing hiding under our desks in case of a nuclear attack. In recent decades, predictions of catastrophic climate change have become routine. We are just emerging from the worst pandemic in a century. And now the suffering and death of Covid is being replaced by the horrible images from Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its threats of nuclear war.

I have lived under the recurring shadow of the apocalypse. But I have been blessed with a loving family and the promise of the gospel. As I write this at Easter, 2022, Jane and I will soon be leaving on our delayed trip to Greece.