



Peninsula City Church

Community

Sitting and Just Staring into the Distance: A Year of Community Reflection 2020

Michael Podhaczky

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Sitting and Just Staring into the Distance: A Year of Community Reflection 2020

Introduction

Q. What would it be like if we took away some real gems from 2020?

Imagine that you are sitting somewhere and just staring off into the distance thinking about 2020. What would your thoughts be like as you reflect? Given what we, as a worldwide community, have gone through. Many will say good riddance to 2020. Countless others will wash their hands of it and will gladly jump into next year. They feel that they have been roughed up by 2020. Some families are limping through challenging times and conversations moving forward.

It could be said right about now that we have gone through all this, 'So that...' How would we answer the 'So that...'? As we head off into a post-COVID-19 society (hopefully), we could ask, 'What will we leave behind in 2020 and what will we take with us in 2021?' Well, here are some things we could mention.¹

- It was a year of dramatic change some for good and other, well, let's just move on. It has been said that 88% are excited to close the door on 2020 and start in 2021.²
- There has been so much negativity, conspiracy theories, violence, death, loss of employment and businesses. Some 68% said that the most negative effect was not being able to travel and, the impact on their lifestyle, etc.³
- There were 69% who said that they are now more anxious about the future; whereas 56% said that they are struggling to find anything useful in 2020.⁴
- There is a new vocabulary that we now have around all of this, e.g., COVID-19, iso, social distancing, unprecedented (an unprecedented use of the word haha), adapt, pivot, new normal. There is the Macquarie Dictionaries word of 2020,

People's Choice Macquarie Dictionary COVID Word of the Year 2020: 'covidiot', i.e., "A person who refuses to follow the health advise aimed at handling the spread of COVID-19, as by not social distancing, taking part in large gatherings etc., as well as buying large amounts of perceived staples, especially toilet paper."

The Committee's Choice Macquarie Dictionary Word of the Year 2020, doomscrolling, i.e., "the practice of continuing to read news feeds online or on social media, despite the fact that the news is predominantly negative and often upsetting."⁵

But is there anything useful and beneficial that we can take away from 2020? Are there any real gems that we can take away from the year? Here we will look at this and see what we can find upon reflection. In some cases there will be some obvious things we might be able to take away; but in other cases, we might need to dig to find something. Maybe in 2020, there is much more than seeing what is good or bad, what worked or what did not work. We have found ourselves in a truly

¹ "Australians post COVID-19: Understanding how COVID-19 has shaped our society." *McCrindle*, October 2020: 1-27.

² "Australians post COVID-19: Understanding how COVID-19 has shaped our society." *McCrindle*, October 2020: 07.

³ "Australians post COVID-19: Understanding how COVID-19 has shaped our society." *McCrindle*, October 2020: 08.

⁴ "Australians post COVID-19: Understanding how COVID-19 has shaped our society." *McCrindle*, October 2020: 07.

⁵ "Do your thumbs hurt from scrolling through the seemingly endless barrage of bad news in 2020? Ours do too, and that's why doomscrolling is the 2020 Committee's Choice Macquarie Dictionary Word of the Year. A very salient marker of 2020, with its barrage of troubling news, from the bushfires to the US elections and, of course, coronavirus. Doomscrolling is a neat construction and gives a nod to our modern-day addiction to our digital devices. –THE COMMITTEE." "Macquarie Dictionary Word of the Year." <https://www.macquariedictionary.com.au/resources/view/word/of/the/year/> (15th December 2020).

different place now.⁶ 'So that...' We might see things from a different perspective since what worked last, or this year might not work next year.

For me, it's been a year of a positive shaking for me 'So that...' I can better see the,

- Importance of: Shaking off the time-wasting and irrelevant clutter of stuff
- Improvement by: My Heavenly Father to see His given skill sets, gifts, and talents
- Improvisation to: To be more in tune with the internal spiritual life of who I have been created to be
- Impartation with: More openness to live a life of empathy, mercy, love, joy, and peace etc.
- Impact to: Stir up those around me to see who they are to our Heavenly Father
- Imputation to: Shakedown the false labels, identity, and ideas that those around me would lay on me

We may need to realise that there might not even be a solution to the current situation that we find ourselves in at the moment. 'So that...' We realise that things are possibly a more profound work in us than we first thought. That is, as it has been said,

"When you find no solution to a problem, it's probably not a problem to be solved, but rather a truth to be accepted."⁷

We need to come to this place 'So that...' We might be able to reflect on what could be the truth that we need to accept coming out of 2020 into 2021 and beyond?

1. Digging in the dirt

Q. So, why bother digging through the dirt?

Have you ever admired a gem, e.g., a valuable diamond, the shape of a piece of common quartz crystal, or even some opal? One thing that they all have in common is that in most cases they had to be dug out of the dirt or from a dirty cave, or fished from a river. They may have first appeared as an ugly rough rock when found. To get these gems, some valuable some not someone had to work to retrieve them and then work on them. It has been said 'So that...' Someone might be able to value and admire them in the future.

We might look at 2020 like this, i.e., as a gem hidden as an ugly rock. It may be a rock with all of its dirt, which is attached to other rocks, in muddy streams, or a dark, stinking cave etc. On the surface, things do not look very good. The rock may look dirty, feel unpleasantly hard and rough, be stinky, and common. However, if we took the time to take another look at the ugly rock of 2020, we might be able to see glimpses of something that we did not see before. Now let's not fool ourselves, 2020 was still unforgiving in its hardness, not very nice to look at and look just like any other rock of a hard time.

However, we could ask a couple of questions regarding the rock that we have found. 'So that...' We might be able to rethink how we would answer them well and practically.

- That is, first, what do we need to do to the rock to reveal its hidden gem likeness?
- Second, what needs to change in our perspective to see what we need to do to reveal its potential beauty and usefulness?

⁶ Bolsinger, Tom. *Canoeing The Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory*. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2015), 109.

⁷ <http://thequotesmaster.com/2016/04/35-famous-quotes-about-change-and-letting-go/> (16th December 2020).

There could be various ways we could answer these questions. However, here they will be answered from one perspective. In answering the first question, the rock might need to be cut to the appropriate shape and size ground and polished to reveal its unique gemlike attributes. Secondly, we would need to see that it is now indeed a work of art, whether it is valuable or not. It may have an underlying value and appeal to us.

It is the same way that we could approach the rock of this year and its effect on us and those around us. Firstly, the year may need to be cut in such a way that it reveals the genuine and unique gemlike attributes and its impact in our lives and community. Secondly, we will need to shift our perspective. That is, to realise that in the hands of the 'Almighty Master Artist' we are a work of art whether others see our value or not. He does see it so; he continues the work that He began. He sees our underlying value and appeal, and it appeals to Him very much so. He wants to use us in His community wherever He has placed us as His masterpiece.

These two questions have been raised 'So that...' We might apply them to where we currently find ourselves in our thinking, lifestyle, and current worldview.

- First, what has the Lord shown us this year that He needed to do to the rock of our life (so to speak) to reveal its gem likeness (Christlikeness)? 'So that...' We might be able to recount one thing the Lord has shown us in 2020, 'So that...' We see that together in Him we will need to trust, what the Lord had been transforming in our lives this year. 'So that...' It will affect 2010 and beyond?
- Second, what has needed to change in our perspective to see our latent usefulness in the community wherever He has placed us? 'So that...' We might be able to put into practice what has He has done in so far as us this year. 'So that...' We can step out into our community and affect it in 2010 and beyond with the gospel of the Kingdom of God?

Pause in His presence for a moment and think this over...

2. Valuing, wearing, or displaying our finds

Q. Really, what right do you have to wear that with joy?

If we did find a rock that turned out to be a valuable gem, when the work on it was completed, we would value it and either wear it or show others. 'So that...' we could enjoy it. But, not only for us to enjoy it, but so might others. It might be something that is displayed in pride of place. It might be handed on to the next generations to enjoy. 'So that...' It is more significant than to just us, but it includes others enjoying it.

Likewise, we may need to re-evaluate the way we have considered 2020. 'So that...' We might be able to value the gem, which has come our way this year as the Lord has worked within our life. We might need to shift our view and see the real issue, i.e., our faulty understanding of things. It will determine how we value and use what has come our way this year. It can either be that 2020 was a waste of time and effort. Otherwise (even with all of its hard bits), it has been a year of transformation for the better. God has been in this year. He is always at work to transform us to become more Christlike, even in times like 2020. We can either trust Him to have our best at hand or not trust Him. Even if we are unable to see it at the time, He will always be working on our gemlikeness.

It is not a new way that God does things. It becomes evident in the Letter to the Hebrews when the writer to the Hebrews challenged them to trust God at all times, even the hard times. The writer talked about God keeping His promise of better things for them. It is a truth that carries across the

generations to us today, right now. Yes, even in the challenging times of 2020 as we move into 2021. The writer to the Hebrews was concerned that these Christ-followers leave the basic teaching about Christ. Instead, they were to push on in Christ to maturity (Heb 6:1). In light of this, the Lord has given hope of completed work in and through us. That is,

“So, let us stop going over the basic teachings about Christ again and again. Let us go on instead and become mature in our understanding.”

The writer, when on to say that, God is faithful to fulfil His promise He made and complete the work that He has started. We have hope, and that hope is unchangeable to the God of truth. That is,

¹³ “For example, there was God’s promise to Abraham. Since there was no one greater to swear by, God took an oath in His own Name, saying: ¹⁴ ‘I will certainly bless you, and I will multiply your descendants beyond number (Gen 12:1-4; 22:16-17).’ ¹⁵ Then, Abraham waited patiently, and he received what God had promised. ¹⁶ Now, when people take an oath, they call on someone greater than themselves to hold them to it. And without any question that oath is binding. ¹⁷ God also bound Himself with an oath, so that those who received the promise could be perfectly sure that He would never change His mind. ¹⁸ So, God has given both His promise and His oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, we who have fled to Him for refuge **can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us**. ¹⁹ This hope is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls. It leads us through the curtain into God’s inner sanctuary. ²⁰ Jesus has already gone in there for us. He has become our eternal High Priest in the order of Melchizedek.” (Heb 6:13-20 NLT).

So, although we have been shaken this year, we can have great confidence as we hold to the hope in Him that lies before us. Since the Lord has promised and has given is His word in an oath. He will continue to transform us to be more Christlike, even in a year like this one.

It has been a remarkable year from my perspective. It has had its challenges and joys. Challenges and joys will continue to come my way until the day that I go to live in my next stage in my life in the next realm. However, in 2020 our Heavenly Father has shown me a lot about Himself and the way that He sees me.

So, what has the Lord shown me this year? Well, for one thing, that, I am valuable to Him, and He desires to display Christ through me to those around me more and more? However, connected to this, He has shown me that there are those around me who underestimate me, take me for granted or see me as just weird. He has shown me that it is okay. Since, He has given both His promise and His oath, which two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie. He showed me this, ‘So that...’ I see my unique value to Him. To see that is not in what I do or do not do, nor is it in the way others see or treat me. Now do not get me wrong I did not have an identity crisis, but our Heavenly Father was encouraging me in my continued transformation. I am being transformed, even at my age. So, when those around me begin to say that ‘You are getting too old’, or ‘You are not as useful now as you used to be when you were younger.’ Therefore, as a result of what He showed me let me say,

“Don’t underestimate me (Michael). I know more than I say, think more than I speak, and notice more than you realise.”⁸

⁸ “Don’t Underestimate Me, I Know More Than I Say, Think More Than I Speak, And Notice More Than You Realize: Daily Success, Motivation and Everyday ... Year Long Journal / Daily Notebook.” <https://www.amazon.com/Underestimate-Think-Speak-Notice-Realize/dp/1075689724> (20th December 2020).

"I am not perfect. I say stupid things. I laugh when I'm not supposed to. I have scars left by people who did me wrong. I'm a little crazy and probably won't change. Love me or not. But one thing I will try my best to do. That if I love, accept, and forgive you, I do it will all my heart."⁹

"There is a message in the way a person treats you. It is how they feel about you period. Just listen..."¹⁰

Some Concluding Thoughts

Q. What would it be like if we took away some real gems from 2020?

So, the idea of saying good riddance to 2020 is not really an issue for me. It has been a good solid year of continuing transformation. I am looking forward to an amazing 2021 and how it will impact our community. It should not just be an ideal, but it can be the reality. The Lord has challenged all of our thinking to some point on some of our long-held community ideas, fears, and biases. For many leaving 2020 and running off to 2021 looks so lovely and appealing. However, there is one thing, which needs to be factored into the equation here that is, we will also be in 2010. We will take ourselves into 2021 with all our baggage haha. So, 2021 is not a cure-all, it is not a magic formula, or a silver bullet to make everything get better and our troubles to disappear.

But having said that, we can take comfort in the unchangeable Lord. He will be there right with us continuing His transformation in our lives whatever it takes. The Lord desires us to become innovative thinkers with what we have already been given. We need to be those who are defying gravity thinkers. That is, we need to escape from underneath the burdens of what we already think about 2020. That is, we need to zero-gravity thinkers. We need to see the unchangeable Lord who is always at work in our gem-likeness, around us and through us. It does not matter what comes our way we need to have a God-given strategy for living in and enjoy the uncharted territory 2021. Here is something that I have found helpful this year. In whatever, we do we need to,

"Start with conviction,
stay calm,
stay connected,
and stay the course."¹¹

Since God has given both His promise and His oath, we can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that remains ahead of us. So, in closing, let me ask you the following two questions,

- Firstly, what one thing has the Lord shown you this year that He needed to do to the rock of your life (so to speak) to reveal its gem likeness? 'So that...'
- Secondly, what has needed to change in your perspective to see your potential usefulness in the community wherever He has placed you? 'So that...'

⁹ <https://ifunny.co/picture/i-am-not-perfect-i-say-stupid-things-sometimes-i-UJy1BfFW6> (20th December 2020).

¹⁰ <https://annedennish.com/2018/11/08/listen-to-how-they-treat-you/> (20th December 2020).

¹¹ Bolsinger, *Canoeing The Mountains*, 127-128.