

Greetings once again from a place where I am doing something I've never, and I've repeat, *never* done before...and that is, keep my furnace running this late into May. Typically, in years gone by, when May 1<sup>st</sup> would arrive, I would just announce with an official, dogmatic, uncompromisable declaration, "***The furnace is off until the fall.***" But now, Pam just flashes that unassuming smile at me and throws out some innocent little question (which she already knows the answer to)... "Is it kinda cool in here or is it just me?" And what do I do? Well I melt like a snowflake in water,\* I melt like a cloud in the silent summer heat,\* I melt like moonlight in the heaven of spreading day.\* (A tip of the hat to Percy Bysshe Shelley, Alfred Tennyson and Victor Hugo.) For the person reading this who is now drowning in a sea of similes, this is what happens, Pam says she's cold and I turn up the thermostat!

Speaking of Victor Hugo, I did give some thought to opening this letter with his words, "*It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.*" This of course is the memorable opening sentence from Hugo's classic, *A Tale of Two Cities* which is regularly cited as the best-selling fiction book of all time. I choose it because it seems in many ways to encapsulate this pandemic we're all going through. Let's start with the worst of times. I'll give just one example. You can think of many I'm sure. This week we drove to the Boston area to see our son, whom we've not seen since Christmas. We brought a bunch of groceries and surprised him with a few cans of Big Franks which he loves. But when we finally saw him and got out of the car, masks securely fastened in place, we realized that we couldn't hug him. I felt like a starving man who has an overflowing plate of rice and beans placed in front of him and then is told he can only look but not eat. That's when it hit me how awful this time is, how unnatural, how for so many people, isolation and loneliness can be just as dangerous as this virus. Kids can't connect with their friends, grandparents with their grandchildren; you all know what I'm talking about. For so many, that's why this is the worst of times.

But on the other hand, we have in some regards, the best of times. First, phone church is better than we could have ever imagined. I'm sure I'm not the only one who feels this great sense of excitement and comradery on Sabbath morning. Secondly, I feel just as connected to the 14 people I have in my Discipleship class

on Zoom than if we were together in the Pathfinder room at church. Thirdly, prayer meeting has revived with better attendance than ever before. Fourth, all our hands have never been cleaner! Fifth, Bob Brand has taken up hair cutting! While it's true there have been hardships, we're finding a silver lining that never could have been discovered had we not been brought over this ground. This is what adversity does. One of the best examples of this comes from an experience Sister White shares in a letter to a young minister and his wife in Vol. 3 of the Testimonies for the Church. She writes to them of her own challenges and difficult times with these words... *"We knew what it was to go hungry for want of food and to suffer with cold for the want of suitable clothing. We have traveled all night by private conveyance to visit the brethren, because we had no means with which to defray the expenses of hotel fare. We traveled miles on foot, time and again, because we had no money to hire a carriage. Oh, how precious was the truth to us! How valuable souls purchased by the blood of Christ! We have no complaints to make of our sufferings in those days of close want and perplexity, which made the exercise of faith necessary."* (But I want to make my point by highlighting the next line.) ***"These were the happiest days of our lives."*** *There we learned the simplicity of faith. There, while in affliction we tested and proved the Lord. He was our consolation. He was to us like the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."* 3T 317

Despite all these afflictions and all these hardships, yet paradoxically interwoven with them, were the happiest times she had ever experienced...not the worst of times, but the best of times. This reminds me of the words the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth...

***"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. 2 Corinthians 4:17-18*** I like the way a contemporary English version puts vs. 17 ***"These little troubles are getting us ready for an eternal glory that will make all our troubles seem like nothing."***

Friends, I don't want to minimize the difficulties, the affliction or the troubles you might be experiencing at this time, especially if in your life, the things you're

seeing in front of you are the *worst* they've ever been. But I do want to give you somewhere to look, some other perspective that will help to lift your eyes above and beyond the temporal, to the eternal. Let me leave you with what Jesus is doing for you just now.

***“He is watching over you, trembling child of God. Are you tempted? He will deliver. Are you weak? He will strengthen. Are you ignorant? He will enlighten. Are you wounded? He will heal...Whatever your anxieties and trials, spread out your case before the Lord. Your spirit will be braced for endurance...The weaker and more helpless you know yourself to be, the stronger will you become in His strength. The heavier your burdens, the more blessed the rest in casting them upon the Burden Bearer.” DA pg. 329***

So cast all your cares upon Him, He loves and cares for you.

Until we meet again, Pastor Mark and Pam