

Choosing Hope Over Despair

Every once in a while, I speak by phone with the editors of some of the publications I write for. In my most recent conversations with two of them, they conveyed the same basic message. They reminded me they want articles with a positive vision of the future. Realistic, but without the doom and gloom of some online sites, and with practical advice on how we might best confront our present difficulties and look to a brighter tomorrow.

Meeting that goal isn't always easy. Like some of my acquaintances and various readers who've emailed me, I sometimes find myself slipping into despair over the fate of our country.

Only a few weeks have passed since Inauguration Day, and we've already witnessed a blizzard of executive orders dismantling the previous administration's programs. Major shifts in personnel are underway that will change the direction of our government, Congress seems increasingly irrelevant, and the National Guard's Capitol mission is currently scheduled to [last through mid-March](#). Donald Trump is facing an impeachment trial even though he is no longer president, and nearly every day brings new assaults on our liberties, with freedom of speech a particular target.

As a result, sometimes it's hard to sit down at this keyboard and play the part of Mr. Sunshine. Railing about politics and culture, which I have done in some of my pieces, and predicting we're all headed into the abyss, that takes a lot less effort than finding glimmers of light in this darkness.

But my editors, who by the way also feel depressed at times by political and cultural news, are on-target in their request. They understand the consequences of despair, that entertaining so bleak an outlook ultimately means defeat. Besides, as I've

said before, hopelessness is a luxury I can ill afford. I have children and grandchildren, former students, and friends and family members, all of whom need encouragement in our current turmoil rather than more hard knocks.

But how do we find hope when the past twelve months have brought so many trials to our nation, when we are a people divided, when rancor, suspicion, and even hatred mark so much of what passes for discourse today?

By *consciously* fighting against the darkness and by looking for the light wherever we can.

For those of us downcast by the news of the last twelve months, we can look past the headlines and find the bright spots. The numbers of homeschooling families, for example, has grown tremendously during the pandemic. A vaccine for COVID-19 is now a reality.

We can also alter our perceptions of the dismal national news by opening our eyes to where we live and the people around us. Though I read every day that America is on a downhill road to hell, you couldn't tell that if you visited my town. Yes, everyone in Front Royal wears masks in certain stores, the lockdowns have permanently shuttered several small businesses, and some churches have yet to reopen their doors, but overall the people I encounter remain as friendly and polite as always. For example, I live alone, but it's a small joy for me to go to the coffee shop and find Jeremy, Alexandra, Joy, Mary, or any of the rest of the crew greeting me with cheery hellos and smiling eyes above their masks.

That short visit is as refreshing as a glass of cold water in August.

Another trick is to remind ourselves that "this, too, shall pass." As we've seen in the last year, political situations can change in the blink of an eye. Who would have predicted in January 2020—the economy was booming, America was fighting no

new foreign wars, and optimism pervaded the lives of many—that we would be stricken with a pandemic, riots, and the weirdest election season in American history?

To despair over today's politics is to forget that tomorrow may deliver reversals. Fortune is a fickle mistress, and the wheel she spins has brought misfortune to far more powerful men and women than those now governing our lives.

Finally, we must remember the healing power of time. Just the other day I had a terrible case of the blues, brought on by some personal troubles and by brooding on politics—that ugly frame of mind Churchill called his “black dog.” To put it mildly, I was unfit for the company of others. But though I couldn't immediately shake that mood, I have also reached an age where I can reassure myself that it's just a mood and that tomorrow will bring sunshine.

And so it happened.

Oscar Wilde once remarked, “We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars.”

Let's stay strong and remember to look at the stars.

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