

Covid

"You are my hiding place; You protect me from trouble

You surround me with songs of victory."

Psalm 32:7 NLT

The first sign, in New Jersey, of alarm over the discovery of a new virus from the other side of the world¹ was the disappearance of (much handled) magazines in waiting rooms. As a volunteer with Interfaith I was often in waiting rooms having given non-driving seniors from local churches (and synagogues) a lift to their appointments. In rapid succession there were no more routine doctor visits, only medical complaint visits, then no more patient helpers (like me) in the waiting rooms, and then no more patients even, in the waiting rooms; they had to wait outside with their rides till called by a nurse to enter one at a time. That continued for Ann Kravitz and me for the duration of the pandemic because Ann needed injections in one eye so as not to go blind. Ann- a very brave, tough, 89 year old was also one of my "Covid heroes".

When the vaccines first became available it was only for medical personnel and vulnerable people like seniors. Problem was that one had to make an appointment online. ONLINE! I only had a flip phone and I only went online at the local library which was now closed. Ann did have a smart phone, but never went online. She did, however, have the good sense to call over to our local health dept in Ewing and there made an appointment. Up to that point I was desperate to get her and me an appointment, but she was the one who came through for me. I'm so very grateful to a widow who, by the way, had kept an orthodox kosher kitchen to please her in-laws while they lived; big hearted kindness and smarts! She enriched my life.

Another life saver was my younger sister in Christ, Miss Grace Cooper. She cooked meals dressed in hazmat that she hung on my front door handle and most importantly, was a steady bulwark against voices and trends that wanted to minimize the pandemic and act presumptuously as if God would protect the lawless regarding safety

regulations. An early example of that was the choir practice in Mt. Vernon, Washington State². It lasted 2.5 hours for 61 people. Next day 53 people tested positive and two died. That breaking news put a righteous crimp in any rebellion regarding church attendance. But after 70 some years of Sunday shalom*, I was very lonely. That's when the Spirit led me to texting- something I had always resisted. God's good idea was to text family and friends: "Happy Sunday!" That caught on and I wasn't so lonely anymore on Sunday- thank You Jesus.

The first death in New Jersey occurred March 10, 2020. Eleven days later there were 1000 deaths. Governor Murphy had no choice but to declare a stay-at-home order for all businesses not essential. Although New Jersey ranked sixth in number of cases, we ranked first in deaths (per capita) in the US³. So imagine how shocked I was when the President of the United States started to ridicule people wearing masks⁴; an anti hero. At the same time (April 20, 2020) Covid hero Dolly Parton gave a million of her dollars toward the Moderna vaccine. Thank God for God.

Masks- the original blue paper ones were easily inhaled blocking one's nose⁵. Early on, my sister-in-law Christ from South Korea, Kim, Wha-Jeong, mailed me a gross of effective and very comfortable Korean masks. I used about ten and gifted the rest to the maskless. Consequently, my Liberty University fellow student now on the other side of the planet was a Covid hero for my home town because the maskless were denied entry to grocery stores. The street people, especially, had little access to personal protective gear and were also initially confused and gladly accepted any help without fear. It was a great time of need and giving. And we seniors, though the most vulnerable, were also the richest in that we were still receiving our Social Security. It felt good to be a rescuer in some situations. I remember that Trenton's string orchestra The Capitol Philharmonic⁶ sent everyone on their patron list a CD entitled "Getting Through This Together" raising funds for out of work classical musicians. America's Keswick was in trouble too. Their free 90 day residential alcoholism treatment program was no longer being financed by Christian retreats. So we retreatants helped without going to their retreats. We seniors were treated well too. The grocery stores opened an hour early just for us. We went to the front of the line for vaccinations. The senior nutrition

program still provided affordable meals – bag lunches set outside for individual pickup. And very early on I remember standing at my glass storm door watching young people walking by. They would wave kindly knowing it wasn't safe for me to leave, since my neighbor, Mr. Rudy, had died⁷.

Despite the bad (evil) example of the POTUS hosting spreader events⁸ like the Rose Garden meeting with close seating and no masks, that almost killed former governor Chris Christie (an asthmatic), there were some never heard of before accommodations. One was that insurance companies allowed me to submit claims for telephone counseling that heretofore had been forbidden. I just had to have the proper codes and the Holy Spirit was faithful to order my steps to that information. Another was that NJ's DMV automatically renewed my driver's license with the expired photo so I didn't have to mingle with the usual mob there. God is good.

Despite the great danger and many losses there were some benefits and special times for me. The significant reduction in counseling sessions allowed me time to reflect on "retirement" and plans to sell my home. The few clients I did interact with were choice- an honor with whom to work, who I still haven't forgotten. I had time for fun too – 25 essays to add to the four I eked out when a lot busier.

Finally there was the TV worship service from The Hour of Power at Bobby Schuller's Shepherd's Grove church in California. Despite no congregation in attendance, the choir safely sang "Is He Worthy?"⁹. That song is a question and response kind. A soloist gently asks a question and the entire choir softly answers. I believe that all the global suffering influenced the choir to sing with gentle gravitas that I had never heard before: the lyrics-

"Do you feel the world is broken?" (*We do.*)

"Do you feel the shadows deepen?" (*We do.*)

"Do you wish you could see it all made new?" (*We do.*)

"Is all creation groaning?" (*It is.*)

"Is a new creation coming?" (*It is.*)

"Is the glory of the Lord to be the light within our midst?" (*It is.*)

"Is it good that we remind ourselves of this?" (*It is.*)

"Does the Father truly love us?" (*He does.*)

"Does the Spirit move among us?" (*He does.*)

"And does Jesus our Messiah hold forever those He loves?" (*He does.*)

"Is anyone worthy? Is anyone whole? Is anyone able to break the seal and open the scroll? The Lion of Judah who conquered the grave He is David's root and the Lamb who died to ransom the slave from every people and tribe, every nation every tongue.

He has made us a kingdom and priests to God to reign with the Son. Is He worthy? Is He worthy of all blessing and honor and glory?

Is He worthy of this?" (*He is!*)

"...for in Him we live and move and have our being..." Acts 17:28

* B'ezrat Ha Shem

1. Wuhan, China Dec. 30, 2019, but onset in patients back to Nov.17, 2019. First case for us was in Washington State Jan.20, 2020.
2. Skagit Valley Chorale in Mt. Vernon, Washington State wasn't a church choir but was initially reported as such and acted as a kind of warning to church people hoping for "divine immunity"

3. A factor in the number of deaths was that many people who worked in very busy and crowded New York City actually lived across the river in New Jersey. Cases counted by home address, not work address. Otherwise New York might have had the most deaths.

4. No clearer picture to me of a POTUS serving the devil: people died without masks. POTUS can cement over the Rose Garden all he wants, but God still remembers.

5. My yard guy refused to wear a mask until he saw the homemade mask from my cousin Gail in Michigan with the New York Yankees logo!

6. The founding of the Capitol Philharmonic was an indignant reaction to the NJ Symphony no longer performing at Patriot's Hall in Trenton because, according to them, there was no interest. That was a lie. Trentonians now fill Patriot's Hall for classical music thanks to the CPNJ. I loved the opportunity to support them.

7. Mr. Rudy, a widower whose only daughter had died a few years before, contracted Covid in the hospital for something else. I'm grateful that his synagogue celebrated his 98th birthday not waiting for him to make it to 100. I'm also grateful to God that he died in a hospital on the phone to his son in Florida, instead of all alone at home. They were small grand mercies.

8. 2020 was a campaign year for the incumbent whose rallies from June 20 to Sept. 22 amounted to a total of 30,000 people with 700 deaths. See Wikipedia's "White House Covid-19 Outbreak."

9. You Tube offers the song from a virtual choir and orchestra. I couldn't find the original online church service version. What's available on You Tube is a little more upbeat instead of grave.