

What was I thinking?

August 15, 2021



It Was a Short Summer

If you're old enough (or if you are fan of Peanuts), you may remember a TV special from 1969 about Charlie Brown and his friends on summer vacation, going to camp and getting mercilessly beaten by the girls in a number of competitions. Before they know it, they are back in school and the teacher gives them an assignment to write a 500 word essay about what they did on their summer vacation. Charlie only comes up with 13 words and he gets a C-. His friend Linus says, "Oh well, it was a short summer, Charlie Brown." Charlie Brown replies, "and it looks like it's going to be a long winter."

I think the kid in all of us can sympathize with feeling of summer being over and school starting back. Summer always goes by too fast and this one seems to have been the fastest. Maybe that's because it was a better summer, in many ways, than last year. We were more free to travel and many of us were trying to make up for what we didn't do last year. My family did make it to the beach, to our usual place at Hilton Head. Many things were the same, but some things were a little different. In order to avoid eating in crowded restaurants, which is something we usually end up doing anyway, we ordered take-out and ate in our condominium. That was much more common this summer for everybody. The pick-up place for food was in one of the restaurants we usually eat in, but now the booths, chairs, and tables were mostly gone. There were just a few tables where bags of food were left to retrieve. A sad but hopefully temporary sign of the times.

We did go to get ice cream each evening, we went to the beach and enjoyed that until sand got in someone's eyes, or we saw a sea creature we didn't want to be around, or

until we just got tired and were ready to go to the pool before heading in. Parents with young children know the routine. At Aiden's request, we played putt-putt. We decided golf's a lot less boring when played around pirate skeletons and when you can use colored clubs and balls. If the group ahead of us hadn't finished their hole yet, we made it even more fun by playing our hole again in a round of hockey-golf. It's more of a challenge to putt if there's a goalie defending the hole. It was different, it was hot, but it was fun, and it was a short summer. Even though it's still summer until September, once school starts it's hard to have the same feeling.



Now it's back to school and work, and we face new challenges this year. May God help us through this year.

One of the things weighing on my mind as we struggle through our challenges is the division we have in our world and in our country. It seems we divide ourselves into groups with opposing views, and at some point, we lose sight of what it is we're trying to accomplish. Instead of working together to solve problems, we find it more important to be loyal to our group. It's sad.

I know this may come as a surprise, but there can even be divisions and disagreements in the church. That can be the church in general, our own denomination, or even in our own congregation. It happens in every church.

This Sunday, we're going to hear about the riots in Ephesus. Paul was certainly dealing with some challenging people! At first, when planning for this service, I struggled to find hymns. It's funny how the scriptural index of hymns skips right over

Acts 19. But I did find hymns and reading the texts and reflecting on them as I've prepared for worship has been interesting.

Christ Is Made the Sure Foundation starts with these words:

Christ is made the sure foundation, Christ the head and cornerstone.
Chosen of the Lord and precious, binding all the church in one.

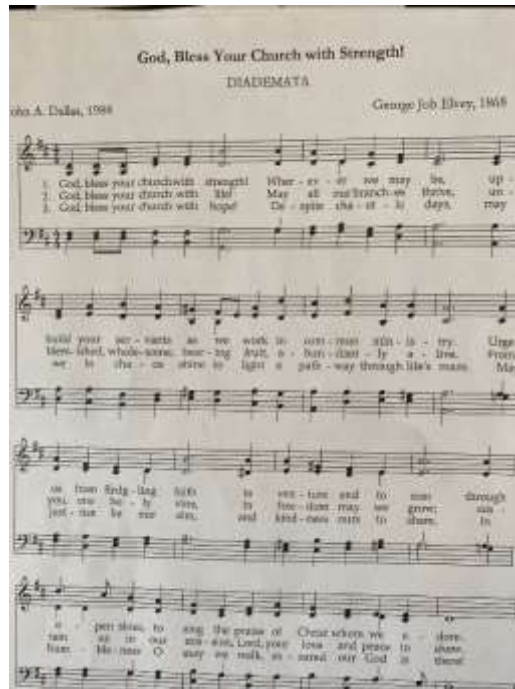
Binding all the church in one? I'm having a hard time seeing that right now.

We're also singing *Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing*, which includes the words, "Here I raise my Ebenezer." In one church I served the singing of that hymn led to an entire sermon after someone asked, "What the heck is an 'Ebenezer?'" It's a Hebrew word that means "a stone of help" put up to give thanks to God. As Paul is arguing with people about the idols and false gods they worship, we're singing about setting up something to honor the one true God.

My favorite hymn we're singing tomorrow is one I've rarely heard. In fact, the only time I've heard it is when I've chosen it myself. I'm not saying that brag, I think this hymn just got mistreated. *God, Bless Your Church with Strength!* is in the 1990 Presbyterian hymnal, the one we have in our pews, but in that hymnal, it's set a tune I don't think I would even choose. It's a Lutheran chorale (hymn), beautifully harmonized by Bach, but it's not at all a familiar tune, and probably not one easily learned.

I think the choice of the tune paired with this text is the reason it's gone unnoticed. But, in the fine print at the bottom of the page, it reads, "Alternate tune: DIADEMATA, 151." If that tune name doesn't seem familiar, looking at hymn 151 will quickly bring it to your mind. It's the tune for *Crown Him with Many Crowns*. The words of *God, Bless Your Church with Strength!* fit well with that tune, and I've been using them together for years.

The text was written by John A. Dalles in 1984 for the 150th anniversary First Presbyterian Church in South Bend, Indiana. Dalles was the Associate Pastor there. The interesting thing is, Dalles originally wrote the text with the tune DIADEMATA in mind. I can't imagine why the text would be paired with an unfamiliar and rather obscure tune when the author had a familiar tune in mind. It sure seems to me that the choice of tune in the hymnal made the hymn go virtually unnoticed. I don't see it in the new Presbyterian hymnal, which is sad. It's a great text with an important message.



Rather than writing a hymn that would just be appropriate for an anniversary, the author wrote a general hymn focusing on the changing world and the church's response to those changes. The text is certainly appropriate now. The final stanza should be our prayer for our church and "the church."

God, bless your church with hope! Despite chaotic days,
 may we in chaos shine to light a pathway through life's maze.
 May justice be our aim, and kindness ours to share,
 in humbleness O may we walk, assured our God is there!

Amen.

We live in challenging times, but we're not the first, and I'm sure we're not the last. I do hope God will bless our church and each of us with strength and hope in these chaotic days.

My mind is still drifting back to the beach. Salty air and sea water are good for you, body, mind, and spirit. I believe God, our Creator, can heal us and can teach us things through nature. We had several experiences at the beach that taught us good lessons. One day while we were there, I could hear Kate talking to someone outside on the balcony and laughing. She came back in showed me a video. Deer are pretty common in the area where we stay; we see them on a daily basis. What Kate saw that day, just at the back of our condo, was a doe (mother dear), standing and watching her fawn

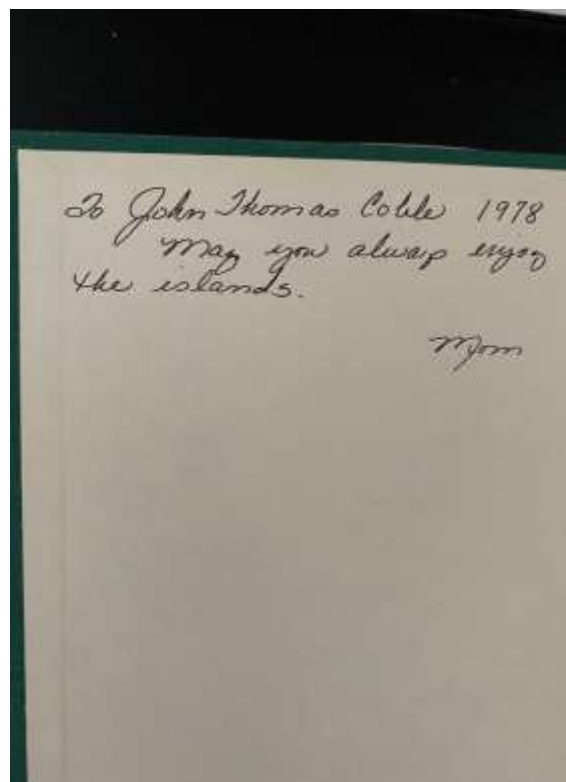
(baby deer), run at top speed from one end of the lawn to the other. The fawn was tearing across the grass to a palmetto tree at the other end, circling around, and running back to the mother, then circling around and doing it again. We know our children sometimes need to get outside and burn off some energy. That doesn't just apply to humans. It's just natural. (Someone also joked that the mother deer was probably rolling her eyes.)

On our last night there, Aiden said, "There's a full moon tonight." I asked how he knew. He loves to keep up with the planets and other things in space and has some apps on his iPad. He also may have just remembered, he's like that. Not long after that, I saw something on Facebook from an organist/colleague and fellow Indiana graduate. He happened to be on Hilton Head and posted a picture of the full moon. I went outside and looked around but saw nothing, so I replied to him and asked where it was. He replied, "um, in the sky?" Smart answer. He was obviously on the other side of the island, facing east. Our place is on the inside of the island, facing west. We don't face the open Atlantic Ocean, our view is the Calibogue Sound and Daufuskie Island. We get to see some nice sunsets. But we could not see the full moon that night. I was disappointed. The next morning, I got up early, as usual, and went out to sit on the balcony with a cup of coffee. To my surprise, I looked out over the water and saw the full moon. It was behind the clouds which lit them up, and as the clouds slowly moved, moonbeams came down over the water. It was quite a scene. Same full moon. Same island. But I had to wait until the next morning to get my turn to see it.



It made me think of several things. Sometimes what you see depends on which way you are looking or where you are standing. Sometimes you have to wait for things to evolve before you get to see something good. (Good things come to those who wait?) It's good to see things through the eyes of children; they can teach us. Thanks to Aiden, I know that little light above the moon was probably Jupiter.

I also realized time evolves, and what we call the "circle of life" brings things around in a new way. It hit me that this was the first time I've been to Hilton Head since my mother died. We went there most summers when I was growing up and she taught me about Daufuskie Island and the Calibogue Sound. I realized I am still on my grief journey. For the first time I couldn't call and check in with Mom when we got to the beach. I couldn't bring back a souvenir for her. I couldn't tell her about Aiden's latest adventures. I wasn't expecting to have those thoughts, but I needed to. One other thing that was different this year is that a certain boat was no longer docked at the marina across the street from our place. When I started going to Hilton Head with Kate more than 10 years ago, I saw and recognized a boat my father and I went fishing on when I was a child. I got to relive some childhood memories by going out on that boat. It took me back in time. This year the boat was gone. I was told it's moved to another marina. Things have changed. Life has changed, and it will continue to. It's up to me to keep my good childhood memories and to pass them on to Aiden, and to make new memories.



We're not the first to go through hard times, and we won't be the last. The world keeps turning. We pray our children will have a better life, but we know it won't be perfect.

God will give us strength, despite chaotic days. All shall be well.

God be with you till we meet again.

John