

# 23 is going to be my year ... I hope

At the end of this week, I will be turning 23, and as that date approaches, I've spent a lot of time reflecting on the past couple of years and thinking about what the next one will bring. So far my twenties have been largely not what I expected them to be, and in many ways, not what I hoped.



**EMMA McNAMEE**  
*What's left?*

planned, my dad and a family friend drove me back to the Twin Cities to be with family.

The diagnosis was ... bleak. My dad and my two sisters said their goodbyes and returned home to work and school. I stayed in the cities with my mom and my uncle to help care for my grandma. We took her home, to the house on the lake that she and my grandfather had built together. We made her comfortable. I held her hand when she went.

It was, in short, a poor way to kick off a new decade. I wish I could say things turned around from there, but a month later, we put down my childhood dog, Luna, and I ended the summer with a severe head injury that meant delaying my last year of school.

I arrived back in Chicago just in time for 2020 ... and two months later, I was packing my bags once more as teachers scrambled to provide answers while the word "pandemic" was uneasily slipped into conversations. It was March then. A friend of mine assured me we would be back in a few weeks, just in time to go out for my 21st birthday.

The day before I left Chicago, I was assaulted on the street while handing out food. I wasn't sure how long I was going to be gone and I hadn't wanted my groceries to go to waste. I struggled to talk about this as much as I struggle to not be angry over it, even though two years have passed. During those first months when everyone was in lockdown, despite how isolating it felt, there was a part of me glad to be away from all other people. I lost some peace of mind over that incident, and I'm not sure I'll ever fully get it back.

There were other, difficult things that happened during those years. My uncle cut ties with our family after my grandmother's death. I attended a friend and former teammate's funeral. He was one of several 2017 graduates from my hometown to take their own lives since we graduated, during a year where nationwide, suicide rates for young people skyrocketed. I think about him often. Every time I go home, I see the photo of us and several other teammates, taken on stage just after qualifying for State Speech our senior year. I can't bring myself to take it down, no matter how sad it makes me.

There are parts of my twenties I don't know how to talk about still. There are moments of closure I am still waiting on. There were spans of months where I felt like I was moving from one tragedy to the next, and as I looked back on what had been an incredibly painful time, I remember being afraid that

adulthood would always be this way. Even writing this, it is disheartening to think back on what was a new start for me, meant to be an exciting time, and reconcile with the fact that so many of the major personal events I remember from my twenties are negative.

Time marches on, though. I finished up my last classes, and 10 months ago, I graduated from college. Four months later, I started a job in my field where I have been able to grow as a writer, a reporter, and a person. I adopted a dog. I have my own place to call home and I am doing my best to fill it with things that make me happy. I have watched good things come to some of the people I love most in the world — many of whom have faced their own hardships over the last few years — and I think, we're going to be OK. We've got people to hold us through the hardships and cheer on our triumphs, and that's enough for me.

I know I am not alone in struggling with the last few years. I know there are plenty of people still struggling with new and old weights that sometimes feel too heavy to bear. To be honest, there are days — weeks, even — I don't carry everything as well as I would like.

When that happens, I lean on the people I love and I try to keep in mind this line I read somewhere once, though I don't remember where. I keep it taped to my wall now, so I don't forget. *Hope is a skill. Hope is not something you have, it's something you create for yourself.*

I'm working on it, still. I am trying to create, even when it's hard, or perhaps especially then. I am hoping for better days — for myself and anyone else who needs it — but if they don't come, I hope the hard times will be brief. Mostly though, I hope you persist. I hope we all do.

## Making scripture relevant to current events

**Worthington**  
Karl Barth, a well-known 20th century theologian, once said that we should "preach with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other." He was making the point that preachers, actually all Christians, need to make the words of scripture relevant to the current situation.



**GALEN SMITH**

a Bible passage for a recent sermon. Jesus was asked to respond about a recent horrific event that was intended by the perpetrator to be as offensive to others as possible. Jesus' response was not the outrage the questioner expected. He compared it to another tragic event and used it as an occasion to teach those who were listening. Jesus often told parables as a way to

teach. Some of his parables are fairly well known, such as the parables of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son, while others may not be as well known. Yet, even the well-known parables can challenge us if we look at them in light of new or changed circumstances. One time we might find ourselves thinking about how we are like one of the brothers in the parable of the Prodigal Son. The next time we might compare ourself to the other brother.

In light of the parables, I got to wondering what Jesus might say about some of our current

events like the war in Ukraine, the Supreme Court nominee hearings, or the storms going through the southern states. Would Jesus tell us it is OK to demonize some individuals, especially if we dislike their positions or what they are doing? Would Jesus encourage us, in righteous anger, to take matters into our own hands? Or might Jesus tell us a parable that invites us to examine our motives and lives and where we might need to repent?

Sometimes the concept of repenting gets a bad

rap. We may think of phrases like repenting with sackcloth and ashes. We sometimes get the impression that repenting involves beating ourselves up over what we have done wrong. The truth is that repenting really means accepting God's invitation to turn from our current path and return to the path that leads to God. It is an acceptance of the offer of unmerited grace from the one who created us and loves us.

One of the things I am certain about is when God wants to say

something, it is said. When God wants to invite someone, someone is invited. If God wants to offer a hand of support to a person, a nation or even the world, God is pleased when that hand is grasped by faith.

During this season of Lent, God invites us to ponder the events of the world in light of Christ's teaching. God invites us to examine our lives in light of what Jesus taught us. The question is, how will we respond to that invitation?

Rev. Galen Smith is pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church, Worthington.

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