

So many things are running through my mind today. The conflict in the Middle East, the immigration issues all over our country, and the little girls missing as a result of the flooding in Texas. Not to mention the trials of life within my family, and for me personally. I understand how people struggle to understand God's love when it seems like the world is completely upside down.

As Americans, we just celebrated the 249th anniversary of our Declaration of Independence, the 4th of July. I find it ironic that we can have so many terrible events occurring all around us, but in the end, we still long to celebrate what is good. Just writing that statement took me right back to God's love. Similarly, we experience turmoil in our lives, some on a daily basis. But no matter what, God is there, loving us in a way that only a Heavenly Father can. Unconditionally, looking beyond our faults and shortcomings, He loves us more than we love ourselves. I believe that is a cause for celebration, even in the darkest of times.

When I recall some of the worst world events that have occurred in my lifetime, I can also say that Christmases were still celebrated, as well as baby showers, birthdays, marriages, and anniversaries. I was very young as the Vietnam War was dying down, and I remember when John McCain was finally back home after being a prisoner of war. I remember the yellow ribbons tied on thousands of trees, as we waited for the hostages in Iran to come home. I watched as President Reagan was shot, and I cried the night John Lennon was shot and killed. I watched live as the second plane flew into the second tower and watched as both buildings fell into piles of rubble.

Christmas still came and went, each and every time. I suppose I think of Christmas more because it is the grand finale celebration of the year. All year long, we live and die, enjoying laughter with friends and family. Likewise, we also grieve the loss of those same friends and family. It's as if Christmas must come, to allow us a moment to reflect on the tough year behind us and we look forward to the new year with hope. God bless those who endure loss or grief amid the Christmas season. It just doesn't seem fair.

I guess what I'm trying to convey is that I believe our celebrations of life keep hope alive. I was not yet born during World War II, but I get emotional when I see footage of the men coming home on the ships, and I dearly love that famous photo of the sailor kissing the nurse on VJ Day. It is a snapshot of the hope that lies ahead. We have all seen it. We have all felt it. To be human is to search for hope.

I absolutely love Christmas. I have loved it since I was a small child. In recent years, I have had to grow up a little bit, concerning this most beloved holiday. As a child brought up in a non-Christian home, it was about the gifts. There was a sprinkling of Jesus' birth in there, but not enough to make me think twice. As a parent, a Christian parent, Jesus was everywhere, but I confess I was as giddy as a child when I bought gifts for my children. As a kid, I suffered every Christmas Eve as I laid awake in bed anticipating what I might find under the tree. I did the same thing as a mom. Wide awake again, anxiously waiting for the first child to wake up so I could witness their faces when they saw what Santa had brought.

Now that my kids are grown, some of that sparkle has left me. It scares me a little because Christmas seems to have changed. Maybe I'm changing, simply due to my growing older. Perhaps we all experience this eventually, but the giddiness and excitement no longer seems to be what it was.

So what are we to do if Christmas and the hope it brings is changing? What if it is our hope that is waning? The fact is our hope is not found in a holiday or a celebration. It is not found in Christmas tree lights or the 4th of July fireworks. Our hope, our eternal and lasting hope is in Jesus Christ, our Lord. In this dark world, He has given me peace, comfort, and even companionship when I have been at my lowest. He is the light.

The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.

Revelation 21:23 NIV

I have no doubt, Christian or not, that you have heard comments about our being in the last days. We've been hearing this for a while, haven't we? As a Christian, I do believe that time is drawing near, but no one knows when that day will be. Only God does. Because I do believe time is getting shorter, I have no choice but to obey the great commission issued to us as believers by Jesus Himself (Matthew 28:19-20).

My friends, I do pray for you to find joy, love, and everything that is good in this life. As people, we will continue to face pain and will have broken bones and hearts on this side of eternity. It is my greatest prayer that you will seek and find hope in the only One who can give you the peace that passes all understanding (Philippians 4:7).

Blessings,

Lisa Jo

