

My Life During the Pandemic of 2020

April 17, 2020

Years after cataclysmic events occur, we find a paucity of written accounts actually made during the time the events unfold. Things are very difficult and the constantly changing landscape makes day-to-day existence so tenuous that the moments needed to write an account are hard to come by. Prompted by a church announcement calling for members to write about how the pandemic has affected them, I am trying to put down on paper what this time means to me, even when we have not yet seen the final outcome.

After my Fall 2019 studio recitals, I had been “sharpening my pencil” preparing a list of students to drop. I was carrying a heavy load which made dividing the studio into only four groups per week a crushing responsibility on any one day. My first step in dropping students was to be significantly more critical in calling recalcitrant ones to account during their lessons. Two immediately quit on their own, and I forcibly dropped another who wouldn’t quit.

After Christmas and the New Year’s break, I was besieged with so many inquiries about starting lessons, I “sat up and took notice”. Why now? I realized I had a good website and it was being promoted well, but this was just plain strange. I developed a written list of contacts, taking notes on them to keep them straight in my mind, and I finally began contacting people to set up interviews. I accepted three new children, and was still in the midst of interviewing when news of the pandemic began to break through in a serious manner.

During the week of March 8, 2020, it was quite certain the spread of the Chinese virus was going to affect us all, and on Wednesday, March 11, I conducted my last interview before things really began to shut down. This interview took place during the lesson time of an adult student who was a psychologist. He had contacted me a few days prior, telling me he had to discontinue lessons due to loss of income—he lost 70% of his clientele—but also due to his own

considerable fear about associating with people any of whom could be potential carriers of a deadly disease. Another adult student made the decision to quit lessons at the same time. The interview I conducted that day resulted in an acceptance, but the mother quickly recontacted me, telling me she had decided not to begin her child's lessons, but assuming I would save her spot for her.

I had my annual tax appointment on Wednesday, March 18, went to church to teach that day, as well as on Friday, March 20. By the time I taught lessons on Sunday, March 22, I had lost six, five of whom wanted to return. Since the church had decided to shut doors beginning Monday, March 23, I swung into survival mode, telling my Sunday people I would be going online. As of that day, I had taken my first steps into conducting online lessons.

What platform would I use? How would I communicate assignments? My library no longer contained copies of all the children's books I taught from. Was I going to have to buy everything in order to have a copy of each to use for myself? How long would this continue? Would people really want to continue piano studies being relegated to an online format? I quickly hammered out a schedule for my first online day, decided to try both Zoom and FaceTime, and got ready for a baptism of reality.

At the end of my first week of online teaching, I developed a regimen that I would remain with. Zoom was no good. There was too much interference from heavy use of the platform—would you want to build a tree platform and invite 1000 people to come up?—and it was too complicated for me. I ordered single copies of every method book I use, and asked everybody to send me a photocopy of their last assignment. I announced a day's schedule at least 48 hour in advance, and spaced out lessons with 10 or 15 minutes' break in between. I would take notes during the lesson, engage in a huge amount of "repeat after me", make sure the student penciled in changes, and made projected assignments very clear during the lesson. After a day of lessons, be it ONE lesson or SIX, I would go through every bit of the student's music, reconstruct the lesson from memory, and write, write, write! No typing. I draw diagrams

in assignment books, and immediately began going into more detail than I had ever used before. At the end of my “lesson regurgitation”, every student would have two pages of written assignment, complete with commendations, criticisms, and clear direction of what to do in the coming week. Why did I do this in an age of three second concentration and self-indulgence?

People were clearly desirous of hanging onto something constructive in their lives that would remain a constant—it would not be wiped away. They were sealed up in their homes, but a piano lesson was something upon which they could depend. Each lesson begins with a moment of catching up. How’s everybody? Are you well? I am fine. Also, there is a LOT of time in which to practice piano, and details can be attended to in far better fashion than before, when there was too much competition for one’s time. I made it my business to give them a product that clearly showed I was lavishing my time and detail on them—more so than in face-to-face lessons. I took parents to task for having households that were too noisy for good piano practice. I found, and am still finding, ways to tighten the screws and give a better product than ever before, and I do this while being an idiot towards digital media. I do lessons with simple FaceTime, and take screen shots of hand-written assignments. People have suggested to me voice-to-print apps, scanning apps for assignments, and it all is a waste. My method works best, and I am going to ride it out until the government—and my church—says I can come out from under my rock and meet with people face to face—at a real piano.

While giving piano lessons has been a challenge during the pandemic, the largest challenge by far has been discerning what God would have me change in my life that is not suitable to ride out such storms as this, or potentially larger storms in our future. It has come to my realization that the virus itself is a tool satan is using to allow government authorities to gain as much control over the populace as possible. President Trump is certainly no pushover, but even he has had to busy himself with issues of the pandemic, and forging a path ahead that will keep the public as safe as possible. In doing so, he has put well-known liberals on his task

force, and because of this, is bowing to the direction they “recommend”. I firmly believe the ground the authorities gain in closing things down, controlling movement of masses of people, making sudden, draconian edicts that people willingly obey, is ground they will never, ever give up. The only way a single person can battle these edicts, laws, and conventions—more of which will follow—is through the Holy Spirit, and if one is intent upon becoming a powerful force in the Spirit, one must seek the Lord as never before.

The common bottom line for every single individual in this pandemic is repentance. I see the presence of COVID-19 as having one purpose, and one purpose only. Whether it is man-made or natural, released by man or released by God, its purpose is to bring people to repentance--first the church, and then the world. God says “Seek me with all your heart, and you shall find Me”. He shows in the Bible that He intends times of crisis to be times of seeking for humans. Seeking the Face of God involves repentance, for imperfect man does not come into the presence of a perfect God without begging forgiveness. Anybody who doesn't seek God's face at this time is missing a tremendous opportunity, because evidence shows He is being sought and letting Himself be found. Revival has swept eastern Tennessee. Bible sales are way up during this pandemic, and ministers who have capability of tracking online attendance of their meetings say attendance is several times larger than before meetings were banned. I have been feasting on excellent online Bible teaching. There is a lot of very fine teaching in cyber-world but the teachings with the most power are the ones crying out for repentance. One doesn't need a movement or a church building to make that happen--all one needs is oneself, and he will be given a heart to reach out to as many others as possible. Leave the talking—screaming—heads behind you and stop panicking. Get alone with God and yourself, and you will find amazing things!