

"LIFE THROUGH THE LENS"



SO HOW WAS 2023?

As I looked at this tree, its branches and boughs, bent, twisted, gnarled, windblown, turned back on itself. Looking as if not sure what had happened. I thought, "You have seen so many years; so much has shaped you, tried to break you, yet you still stand here with a unique beauty, shaped by your experiences, giving nurture to the birds that visit and providing shelter to the little critters inhabiting your cracks and crevices under your outer skin. What a wonder you are! Time has not diminished you in any way.

As I write this, we are only a few days away from the end of another year.

It may be an appropriate time to pause, look back over these past twelve months and ask ourselves, "How has this past year shaped me? What winds of temptation have tried to break me, and did they change the shape of my attitudes, thoughts, and reactions to others – or even toward myself? Which elements of life threatened to break me or bend me? Did I lose my direction, become twisted, and turn in on myself for a while?

I don't know how you have come through this year or how you feel now at the end of it.

But I would encourage you to take a quiet moment and consider the God of the Bible, who also says, "I love you, and I will always be with you, even if you don't always understand how I love and help you," If this God, maybe even through the actions of others has helped, encouraged, strengthened you through this last year, then tell him "Thanks" like you would any other friend who had helped.

You might think, "I don't have enough faith for Him to be even interested in me." But, He tells us in his words, "If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you." (**Matthew 17:20-21**) You may not be into moving mountains, but His words emphasize that even the tiniest bit of faith is enough to start understanding His love toward you. Still not sure? Then, simply take some time to tell Him of your doubts. That means, "God, I'm not sure, but I am open to learning about and experiencing your love."

We are also told in His Word to "Rejoice always, pray continually, and give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." (**1 Thessalonians 5:16 – 18**) This might be worth considering as an excellent way to end the year.

Wishing you all a blessed New Year,

Kevin.