

Josh Meredith

Letter to Taylor Students

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In the midst of all that is happening in the world right now with the outbreak of Covid-19, we have all faced change in our daily rhythms and routines. We have been shocked, jolted, stifled. We have been left confounded and confused, wondering “when will it ever return to normal?” Hardly to be taken as words of encouragement, C. S. Lewis (1939) offered a sobering perspective when faced with gross uncertainty: “Life has never been normal” (p. 48).

Lewis wrote and preached a sermon in the Church of St. Mary the Virgin at Oxford in the fall of 1939 during the outbreak of World War II in Poland. In such a time, one could easily compare life under conditions of war to life before war. Life then was free, without fear of artillery shells falling upon and obliterating one’s city. Life during war was faced with rationing of important supplies needed for war efforts. Life in war time can be disrupted, uncertain, and fearful.

However, Lewis gave us a stark reminder: life is not and has never been normal. We are – at every moment of our existence – faced with death. War brings about nothing new in this sense. There is a saying: the only two certainties in life are death and taxes; but, depending on the outcome of a war, the only certainty remaining will nevertheless be death! If life has never been normal, one could also conclude that war is normal. Why should it live beyond the realm of possibilities in our minds?

Though quite different from war, a global pandemic such as Covid-19 can bring about a similar ripple effect through the disruption of life rhythms. We are suddenly reminded that life is fleeting, and we will not live forever. A pandemic like the one we are currently facing requires of us, as a global community and human family, to come together. Our lives are not only about us. In this sense, Lewis (1939) offers another sobering and needed reminder: “A man may have to die for [his] country; but no man must, in any exclusive sense, live for his country” (p. 51).

Whether we are in times of war or times of peace, we have to choose how we will make the most of the life we have been given.

In the last month, we have all faced the same question: how shall I spend my time today? The context and implementation of the answer to that question has drastically changed, but the mission of our lives has not. We are followers of Christ, students, parents, teachers, and so on. We are given a finite amount of time on earth, and as Christians we are promised suffering and difficulty. In following Christ, we are commanded to love God and love our neighbors. The disrupted rhythm caused by a global pandemic gives us a different opportunity to love our neighbors – through self-isolation, social distancing, protecting the most vulnerable, controlling the spread of the disease, and preventing overload of healthcare systems. Our pursuit of learning is – to paraphrase Lewis – a way we can love and serve God.

My peers, brothers and sisters in Christ, my fellow Taylor community, you are loved. You came to Taylor for a reason. Whether you are a freshman, a senior, or somewhere in between, the mission has not changed. You are pursuing an education; however, the supreme, rich context of Taylor University community is no longer at our fingertips. Though we are scattered and isolated, our current circumstances are an opportunity. Use this time to deepen your relationship with Christ, with family, to grow in your individual learning and maturity. Use this historic time as an opportunity and a reminder: life is never normal.

Every day is a gift we are to steward. Our learning, and our pursuit of beauty, truth, and community can be done to the glory of God. Likewise, our isolation and social distancing can all be done to the glory of God. In how we move through this together as individuals, as a Taylor community, as a global human family, it can all be done to the glory of God. How are you stewarding this opportunity? Life is never normal. Carpe diem Christi: seize the day for Christ.

References

Lewis, C. S. (1939). Learning in war-time. *The weight of glory and other addresses* (pp. 47-63).

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