



May 2020 Artists Almanac

*When the Present has latched its postern behind my tremulous stay,
And the May month flaps its glad green leaves like wings,
Delicate-filmed as new-spun silk, will the neighbors say,
'He was a man who used to notice such things'.*

THOMAS HARDY

May, Mary's month. We have waited for you all winter; instead, we're all in a governmentally decreed quarantine, locked down, fearful for our health, or worse.

Not fair, we complain, and look for someone to blame – the Chinese, our own government, or medical science, which we thought protected us from plagues.

In a time of pandemic such as we are in today, we turn to the three virtues: Faith, Hope, and Charity. We live by faith, and, because of it, we practice charity, the greatest of them. But then there's hope, tender little hope, squeezed between those two giants. What consolation does it offer to us in a time as this?

There are, it seems to me, at least two different kinds of hope. One is our intentions - what we plan - what we pray for, as, for example, deliverance from this disease. The other is expectation, sure and certain, based upon the rock of faith.

Nature and springtime provide us with a perfect example of this last. We expect the sun to rise tomorrow and the leaves and flowers to turn toward it. This is *hope expressed as expectation*.

Some twenty years ago, a very, very late spring freeze killed not only the buds on the trees, but the emerging leaves as well. What a strange June that was, with the woods displaying autumn's orange, browns, and yellows. Yet we hoped – even expected - the green leaves of summer would return. And they did.

The English country parson, George Herbert, once wrote '*He that lives in hope danceth without music*'. He died a young man at 39, in hope of the Resurrection. Based on his *faith*, his *hope* rose to *expectation*, which saved him from despair, the opposite of hope.

The fear and uncertainty surrounding the coronavirus pandemic may feel new to many of us. But it is strangely familiar to those who lived through the polio epidemic of the last century. None of us who lived through it can ever forget the polio epidemic. The World Health Organization estimates there today are 10 to 20 million polio survivors today. In 1977, the National Health Interview Survey reported that there were 254,000 people living in the United States who had been killed or paralyzed by polio and over half a million people worldwide each year, including our president, Franklin D. Roosevelt, then the most powerful man in the entire world.

Many people infected with polio did not show any symptoms. Some become temporarily paralyzed; for others, it resulted in permanent disability. In 1952, the polio epidemic reached a peak in the U.S.: almost 58,000 reported cases and more than 3,000 deaths.



Like a horror movie, throughout the first half of the 20th century, the polio virus arrived each summer, striking without warning. No one knew how polio was transmitted or what caused it. There were wild theories that the virus spread from imported bananas or stray cats. There was no known cure or vaccine.

For the next four decades, swimming pools and movie theaters closed during polio season for fear of this invisible enemy. Parents stopped sending their children to playgrounds or birthday parties for fear they would “catch polio.”



Today the Coronavirus, by comparison, has confirmed US victims of 1.13 million, with 65 thousand deaths, or 7/100ths of 1%, or 1 out of every 5,000 people. World figures of 3.36 million cases are suspect, as many countries, including China, Russia, Iran and other totalitarian states are believed by US intelligence sources of hiding their true figures.

These numbers pale when compared with the effects of the Spanish flu in 1918, with about 59 million deaths worldwide, with about 675,000 occurring in the United States, which was about 1 of every 150 Americans. This was more than all the soldiers and civilians killed during World War I. Most of us don't remember

this, but I do remember my mother-in-law telling of the cavalcade of ambulances passing her then residence as a young girl on their way to St. Thomas Hospital.

What then do we draw from these grim statistics? First, we may expect more of these from time to time, and medical science, hygiene and quarantines all have their part to play in avoiding, mitigating or eliminating them, but so far, no one has proven a reliable prophet in predicting them. We must live day by day in hope of avoiding them and expectation the experience gives us that this will end one day, and the sun will break through the clouds again.



Even lockdowns have their advantages, which include time for family, painting, contacting old friends, and gardening. Spring, as we have long expected it to do, shows us the way.



First the brave jonquils burst forth from their bulbs buried in months of cold seclusion.





Then came the redbud and dogwood, followed by the sturdy irises,



and now,
in May,
come
peonies
, azaleas
and the
first
roses,

smothering Stonehearth in their fragrant exuberance. promising better times ahead,





May our hope reinforce our expectation that better days lie ahead, and that this, too, shall pass.