

A photograph of a wooden chair and a desk in a room with a window. The chair is a simple wooden chair with a curved back and a wooden seat. The desk is a dark wood desk with a metal leg. The window is in the background, showing some greenery outside. The overall scene is dimly lit, with the light coming from the window.

MESSAGE OF HOPE

By Bill Pugh

Recently I watched the film *Les Misérables*. Dramatic and terrible scenes picturing the French Revolution. Haunting and involving music. One lyric recurs in my mind again and again.

*“There’s a grief that can’t be spoken,
There’s a pain that goes on and on,
Empty chairs and empty tables,
Now my friends are dead and gone.”*

Around the world such a scenario is occurring again and again. The pandemic has taken millions of lives. Friends, families, innocent lives known and unknown. Family circles are broken, birthday celebrations cancelled, weddings down-sized and funerals limited to a few. Everywhere empty chairs and empty tables. How long will it all go on? Will the curves flatten? Will there be a vaccine and a cure? The great unknowns.

Soon it will be Christmas. A Christmas unlike any others in our

life time. It is a time when we gather in our own traditions as families and friends. Happy time of celebration and goodwill. It is the birthday of the greatest healer and health worker who ever lived. In his short life he healed, helped and saved. He had a message of Hope. He took on the greatest pandemic of evil. He was misunderstood by the system, condemned and crucified for his trouble. Yet he forgave his enemies.

This year, the pandemic will leave us with many empty chairs and empty tables. There will be many crosses to remind us of what we have lost, and we will look for a sign of hope. And it comes when we process the rest of his story. The message Jesus preached was love, forgiveness and new beginnings.

In the midst of this terrifying time we need to demonstrate and hold fast to the faith which underpins our lives.