

PASTOR’S CORNER

Psalms inspire us to bring change to the world

It may feel very difficult today to come up with things to be thankful for in our world. There are wars and rumors of wars. Poverty in the USA seems to be increasing. We seem to have a mental health crisis on our hands. When I think about these things, I feel like I can’t breathe.

Psalm 65

65:1 Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion; and to you shall vows be performed,
65:2 O you who answer prayer! To you all flesh shall come.
65:3 When deeds of iniquity overwhelm us, you forgive our transgressions.
65:4 Happy are those



Orlando Gallardo Parra

whom you choose and bring near to live in your courts. We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, your holy temple.
65:5 By awesome deeds you answer us with deliverance, O God of our salvation; you are the hope of all the ends of the

earth and of the farthest seas.
65:6 By your strength you established the mountains; you are girded with might.
65:7 You silence the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples.
65:8 Those who live at earth’s farthest bounds are awed by your signs; you make the gateways of the morning and the evening shout for joy.
65:9 You visit the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water; you provide the people with grain, for so you have prepared it.
65:10 You water its furrows abundantly, settling

its ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its growth.
65:11 You crown the year with your bounty; your wagon tracks overflow with richness.
65:12 The pastures of the wilderness overflow, the hills gird themselves with joy,
65:13 the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout and sing together for joy.
Psalm 65 gives me hope. The spirit of God inspired the writer of this psalm. This is a beautiful psalm that describes God’s reign over all peoples, “To you all flesh shall come.”

Sing for joy

Verse four describes a place where we may find happiness with God. In God’s holy temple, there we find happiness: “Happy are those whom you choose and bring near to live in your courts. We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, your holy temple.”
It is very important for Christians to find their sacred space with God, a place where we can breathe and be restored.
Humans have made a mess of God’s beautiful world. Humans have the potential of achieving great and wonderful good things. Hence God entrusted us with God’s kingdom and the gospel of Christ.

Verses 6 to 13 described God’s wonderful creation. Verse 13: “the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout and sing together for joy.”
God has entrusted us with a beautiful world. The human mind and body are awe inspiring and still a mystery to many scientists. Yet to this day, we are killing one another and destroying God’s beautiful earth.
May Psalm 65 inspires us to change into the people who bring happiness and, like creation, “shout and sing together for joy.”
Orlanda Gallardo Parra is a former pastor in Leavenworth.

The class of 2020 reflects on a graduation wrecked by COVID-19

Five years ago today, University of Kansas senior Caroline McCray woke up and connected through the internet to a remote yoga class. She practiced the poses in her mom’s kitchen, family dogs at her feet.

For McCray, May 16, 2020, was a typical Saturday in Fairway during the COVID-19 lockdown.

She finished her yoga class and saw something unusual out the front window of her home. Foot-high letters in the front yard read “YAY LELA!” along with stars and a smiley face wearing a graduation cap. A celebration coordinated by her mom also featured McCray’s sister and boyfriend, plus mimosas during an outdoor brunch that morning.

McCray posted photos from the day on Instagram. The caption: “this year’s graduation ceremony consists of yoga clothes and dogs.”

“I think as a 21-year-old college student at the time, I was still kind of sad not to be with my friends,” McCray said this week. “But I only have good memories from the morning, and looking back on it now, those are still the three most



Eric Thomas

important people to me.”
If the pandemic had not forced the closure of campuses at KU and hundreds of other universities, the weekend of May 16, 2020, would have been a raucous and jam-packed graduation weekend. Instead, the class of 2020 — from kindergarten to PhD graduates — celebrated remotely and modestly.

If not for the pandemic, McCray and thousands of fellow KU students would have descended the “Hill” on the Lawrence campus from the Memorial Campanile to the football stadium.

As a KU instructor, I have been thinking about the class of 2020 this week on the five-year anniversary of their not-so-graduation ceremony. In many ways, this weekend’s graduates, the class of 2025, will have the commencement that the class of 2020 envisioned.

Putting on make-up and fine tuning your hair with your roommates. Gathering on Jayhawk Boulevard and running into four years’ worth of friends. Snapping pictures by (or in) the Chi Omega fountain. Popping open champagne with whoops and cheers. Spending one last night at your favorite

Mass Street bar.
Curious about how the canceled in-person graduation looked to the Class of 2020 with the distance of five years, I interviewed students from my documentary class held that 2020 spring semester.
The class, like graduation itself, ended with a thud. We had arranged to tag along with Kansas City mayor Quinton Lucas as he managed the city and taught at the KU Law School. The pandemic mangled our plans for that documentary project.

Students in the class pivoted to creating podcasts about fellow students, asking them about their pandemic realities. Emily Beckman, who earned bachelor’s degrees in journalism and women, gender and sexuality, said this week that those interviews stuck with her.

“I would check in with four students regularly to hear how they were navigating lockdown,” Beckman said. “There was something so human about knowing we were all moving through a time of major uncertainty and isolation together.”

Riley Wilson, who came to KU after graduating from Wamego High School and is now a lawyer in Texas, remembers returning to campus in June, a month after graduation because there was no in-person option.

“We went to campus later with just

me and my family,” Wilson said. “I had my graduation stuff on, and my mom took pictures of me, and I did get one in the bell tower. I got to walk through the bell tower, but instead of it being with all my friends, it was with my family. So it was just a very different experience.”

In April 2020, the news that in-person graduation was canceled wasn’t a surprise to Wilson and McCray. Both agree that it was the safest choice, especially because traveling and flying was seen as particularly risky.

“Once other schools started canceling, I had the feeling that it was going to happen and definitely was bummed,” McCray said.

Five years later, she describes the canceled graduation as feeling like “loose ends.”

Graduation “was supposed to be like our last celebration of college,” McCray said. “No one was mad or upset about having some classes online. But (graduation) was definitely more of a celebration that we didn’t get to have.”

So, to the class of 2025 from the class of 2020: Don’t take this weekend’s days of celebration for granted.

Eric Thomas teaches visual journalism and photojournalism at the University of Kansas in Lawrence.

Memorial

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Day and participate in a patriotic observance.
The Leavenworth National Cemetery serves as the final resting place for over 49,000 of the nation’s heroes.
The Leavenworth Memorial Day Committee is comprised of volunteers from various local organizations committed to ensuring a respectful and meaningful commemoration each year.
Members of the public are encouraged to attend. Please arrive a few minutes early to allow for parking and seating.

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Henry Leavenworth Chapter Past President and current Kansas Society Sons of the American Revolution Vice President Jerald Gross received the SAR Distinguish Service Medal from President Bennett Dickson. Gross received the Distinguish Service Medal for his dedication and superior service to the current chapter president. Walt Schley

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