

**[OFF]** So by now I hope you know that I'm a techie, especially when it comes to electronic displays. Part of that comes from my temperament, and part of it through my PhD training in human vision and electronic displays. And so in 2020, when high-resolution 4K displays are so common that they're even used on laptops, it's killing me that everything we're doing on Zoom, Facebook, and YouTube is in 1080p, broadcast over fragile Wi-Fi bottlenecks and an unreliable internet! Let me explain. 4k displays give life-like images with realistic colors with 3840x2160 pixels, enough pixels so that even the thinnest curved lines look smooth and not jaggy. 4K displays refresh fast enough so that motion in a video doesn't look jerky. Fast Wi-Fi and a reliable internet connection means that the information going from and coming to your computer is complete and arrives on time. That's the way things are supposed to work in 2020. They're just supposed to work.

**[SHARE: Bad Zoom Photo]** Instead, we have 1080p at 30 frames per second over spotty Wi-Fi and internet speeds. 1080p is about half the resolution of 4k, with 1920x1080 pixels, so about half the information compared to 4K. That half is halved again by using a frame rate that's half as fast, leaving us with only a quarter of the information present in 4k. And the Wi-Fi and internet problems? Well that just takes something bad and makes it even harder to hear and see. If you've been on a Zoom call you've had the experience. You've even seen it in our worship recordings: faces get blurry, images freeze up, and sound skips and stutters. Sometimes the cameras pick up the light coming in from a window, and so all you see is a dark silhouette of the person you're talking with.

It's not just that I'm a tech snob, it actually takes extra energy and attention to follow a Zoom conversation under these conditions. On top of all that, the lack of other information we normally rely on such as body language makes Zoom calls, and video worship, an entirely different, and often somewhat lacking, experience.

**[OFF]** Friends, can I be honest and say that in 2020 we are living in a 1080p time? In so many ways, our lives can feel like we're living them with degraded fidelity. Singing happy birthday to your grandchild over Zoom is a miracle, but it's not the same as holding them in your arms. Worshipping on Facebook has allowed us to include people who previously weren't able to participate in our worship, something for which I'm really

grateful. But let's face it, online communion can feel like a pale imitation of sharing a loaf and a cup in person. We're living in a 1080p time also because our lives have been turned upside down by the riots and the Black Lives Matter movement which has forced us to confront something we've been pretending doesn't exist because the vast majority of us worshipping today have white skin and privileges we're not even fully aware of. We're living in a 1080p time because our vacations have been cancelled, postponed, or scaled back; very few of us are getting on airplanes and flying to exotic places; some have lost their jobs or even their friends or family; and because we've all spent so much time staring at the walls in our houses that we're starting to notice all those unfilled nail holes and places in need of some touch-up paint.

**[SHARE: Smoke]** On Monday evening, this was the view from my front yard. A trucking business in the industrial park near our home in Hanover was completely engulfed in flames sending giant plumes of dark black smoke throughout the neighborhood. Fire engine sirens blared as firefighters sought to contain the flames from the burning tires, gas, and oil.

**[SHARE: burned business]** The next day, this is what was left of the business. I could just make out a water heater that remained standing. Fires, riots, and pandemics have a way of illustrating exactly what King Solomon was talking about when he wrote, "A generation goes, and a generation comes."<sup>1</sup> "All is Vanity."<sup>2</sup>

**[OFF]** When we're living in 1080p times, it's important for us to remember some things. The first is that we're hardly the first people to face disappointment and crisis in life. Pandemics, fires, race riots, natural disasters, recession and depression, and countless other difficulties are all recurring themes in human existence. People continue to get diagnosed with cancer, pandemic or no. People still suffer the ravages of dementia, whether we are reforming racial relations or not. Solomon's wisdom can sound morose, but it really is wisdom to recognize that the troubles we face in this life are really nothing new. The names and faces may change, but very truly "there is nothing new under the sun."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ecclesiastes 3:4, New Revised Standard Edition

<sup>2</sup> Ecclesiastes 3:1, Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ecclesiastes 3:9, Ibid

That is, of course, except for the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, which revealed God's love in an entirely unique and powerful way. That is the one immutable historic fact that is new and is changing everything. In these 1080p times we must continually, daily, hourly if necessary, remind ourselves that we are God's beloved children, and no circumstance of life can ever change that. I'm not saying that God's love magically takes away our shock, grief, and pain, but it does speak directly and powerfully to our identity, purpose, and the meaning we find in our days. Without God's love, life truly is all vanity. Let's remind ourselves of God's love with Paul's beautiful message found in Romans 8, verses 18-24. I'm reading from the New Living Translation.

**[SHARE:]** {Read Romans 8:35-39, NLT}

**[OFF]** Easy words, you might say- the words the pastor always reads at a funeral. But talk is cheap. How can those words actually help me to not only face these 1080p times, but to find joy in them?

Let's start by considering the scope of what Paul is claiming. The list starts with death and life: Neither death nor life will be able to separate us from the love of God. Well that about has it all covered, doesn't it? We already know that because of the Easter resurrection of Jesus, we don't have to fear that death will separate us from the love of God. Does Paul really need to go on? Yes, because it's not usually death, but the physical, emotional, and spiritual circumstances of life that cause us to quaver: trouble, calamity, persecution, hunger, destitution, danger, threat, fears for today, and worries about tomorrow. 1080p times are filled with all of those things. Yes, the shadow of death does continue to dog us, but we have accepted, at least by faith, that Jesus has us covered on that end. But what about in this life? Is it possible to live in a 1080p time and also experience the love of God?

**[SHARE:Tree]** I never want to suggest that I have all the answers, especially easy answers, but here's what helped me this week to find joy in this 1080p time. I keep coming back to the very first Psalm, where we see the contrast between those who remain rooted in the Word of God, and those who are blown around by the wind like chaff. To be honest, there have been times lately when I've felt more like a log floating down a wild river than a tree planted on its shores. As I wrote this message on Wednesday morning, a sister in Christ wrote to say her cancer had returned. Earlier that morning, another of God's beloved called

to say the graveside memorial service we had planned was being scrubbed over the objections of an atheist family member. And in-between those, a brother in ministry shared in a Zoom meeting how his church had had to let him go because of the uncertainty of the COVID situation. Like every other day, Wednesday was a 1080p day. What helped me to get through it, and to do that with even joy, were those words of the psalmist: “But they delight in the law of the Lord, meditating on it day and night. They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season.”<sup>4</sup>

Isn't it interesting that the huge collection of Psalms begins with this beautiful image of God's people being firmly planted by the living water of God's Word and Spirit? As I reflected on that image, I came to see how I had allowed the unceasing noise of news feeds, social media, and Zoom calls to drown out my time spent meditating on God's Word.

Friends, I'm not saying to you that you're unfaithful or in some other way bad if you're struggling in your life. What I am saying is that when I feel a lack of peace, when I feel uprooted and worried and I'm wondering if the struggles of these 1080p times will ever come to an end, the answer for me is invariably that I need to come back to meditating on God's Word. Even five or ten minutes giving my full attention to pondering a part of God's Word brings new life into my parched bones.

**[OFF]** I have one more 1080p item to share with you this morning, and it's not an easy one. So here it is. Laurie Schroeder, our Lay Associate Minister, has announced that she will be retiring from her paid staff roles at BUMC at the end of August. The truth is that Laurie and I have talked about her retirement plans for many years and she has even been in conversation with the Staff-Parish Team for at least a year. Laurie loves you and this church so much, she's done her level best to prepare us for this moment. What changed for Laurie is the timing of her retirement. Many of you know that Joe Schroeder, her husband, was diagnosed last year with a serious health condition that has in all likelihood permanently compromised his immune system. For Joe and Laurie in this 1080p time, what makes the most sense for them is to focus on caring for each other, their family, and their apple orchard. Laurie will be sending a letter out to the congregation soon which will give her a

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<sup>4</sup> Psalm 1:2-3, Ibid

chance to say farewell in her own words. Meanwhile, Laurie will continue in her staff roles through the end of August.

I'm sure many of you want nothing more than to rush over and give Joe and Laurie big hugs, but especially because of Joe's health, Laurie would most appreciate receiving a card from you in the mail. Laurie has been a member of this church for most her adult life and a paid staff person for more than twenty years. Please thank her for every selfless act of kindness she has shown to you and so many.

And remember, to experience grief is to be human. Jesus wept, and we will weep. But in the mist of whatever it is in these 1080p days that is weighing down your heart, cling to the love of God that has been revealed to us in Christ Jesus. Soak your soul in the life-giving Word of God. And take heart, because it is often in the midst of painful circumstances that God's Spirit of comfort can be most clearly seen.

**[SHARE: Reflection Slide]** Please take a minute now to reflect on how you'll find joy in these 1080p times. If you like, you can share a comment or a prayer on Facebook.



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