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Dear friends,

Here's to a warmer January, and a cooler 2023! I am drawn to extremes just like anyone I suppose, but as I get older, the more I admire and aim for the middle. Spiritually, politically, even gastronomically. And most of all, meteorologically! I don't mind a bit of snow, a bit of chilly weather, just like I don't mind a chance thunderstorm or a sunny day. But woefully long, bitter cold spells with piles upon piles of plowed snow? That's extreme, I say, and I'm no fan of it.

There's a christmas hymn in our green hymnal (Lutheran Book of Worship, 1978) called *Cold December Flies Away*. It's a Catalonian carol, not something you often run into in Lutheran hymnody (I love that word *hymnody* - it sounds like a song that puts you to sleep!) Catalan is a lovely area that sits astride the border of Spain and France, from the Mediterranean Sea up to the Pyrenees mountains. Sounds warm and sunny.

The tune is catchy but very tricky - it's more something you'd hear a choir or soloist sing than try as a congregation, and as I said, I try to avoid extremes these days.

And on reading it, it seems more like an Easter hymn than Christmas - 'April's crowning glory breaks'? It goes in the two first lines from December to April - that's a big jump over January, February and March, which as we know, are WINTER. Maybe not in Catalon, but sure for here.

*Cold december flies away / at the rose red splendor
April's crowning glory breaks / while the whole world wonders
At the holy unseen power / of the tree which bears the flower
On the blessed tree / blooms the reddest flower
on the tree blooms the rose / here in love's own garden
full and strong in glory.*

To be transported from December to April might be delightful! Or to transport myself, like many do, to warmer places for the winter months. Retirement is still a ways off, I know, but I can dream!

But we all know winter is here for a reason. The cold and wet weather nourish the ground and renew our rivers and lakes. It kills nasty bugs that can make us sick. The cold is pure and clean, even if it is a tremendous hassle. We gotta have it.

So I'll stick it out in January, February, and March as well. Carol and I have snow cleats for walking unshoveled sidewalks. We have snowshoes for parks and hills, and the pups are happy in the snow. We'll give cross country skiing a try with the pups this year, and see how many times we fall over them. Could be fun! Probably gonna be cold. But that's okay, we can deal.

I hope you can deal as well, knowing a good clean summer can only come after a good wet winter. I hope you can find light in the short days (they're getting longer every day!). I hope you can feel the warmth of Jesus' life among us, his Emmanuel God-with-us presence day by day. And I pray that warmth keeps you going in faith, hope and love.

Grace and peace,

Pr Greg