

Column

Waiting is hard work for people of any age, but especially for little folks. In summer, as the family heads off for the beach or the mountains, there comes a tiny voice from the back seat: “Are we there yet?” In December, the same voice is heard saying, “How many days before Christmas?”

In our younger years we tug at the throttle of time trying to speed it up. As adults we violently pull at the break, trying to slow it down, especially in December when the demands of family, friends – and yes -- even church press in around us.

Advent is the four-week period before Christmas. It is supposed to be a time of quiet waiting and reflection, but how can it be? If you are like most this time of the year, you have a daily planner that is pinned in at every corner. Seasonal concerts, office parties, gift buying, holiday decorating and a multitude of other little tasks and obligations vie for every moment of your time.

Now, I am not for a moment suggesting that these things are wrong or trying to make “Grinches” out of anyone. What I am saying is that we miss much of the joy and significance of the season if we don’t reserve a little time for reflection; if we shut Christ out of our celebration; if we allow the temporal things of time to eclipse the enduring things of eternity.

Twenty or so years ago I clipped out a piece from a daily newspaper suggesting five positive things we can do during Advent to avoid holiday fatigue. The paper has turned yellow, but the suggestions are still timely and practical:

- Write a Christmas letter to someone. In it, give a word of encouragement. Tell this person what he or she has meant to you.
- Think quietly for five minutes about the gifts you have received in your life.
- Pray today for all who are lonely. After praying, make a point to visit or call at least one person.

- Forgive someone who has hurt you.
- Begin a family discussion by asking: Why is Christmas worth waiting for?

Can we find time for these things in our busy schedules? Can we afford not to?

An unknown poet has left us these words:

Christmas comes with joyful greetings, / Blazing hearts, and festive meetings, / Christmas comes to-night, tomorrow, / Christmas-eve, and Christmas-day.

Christmas comes; but ask the reason, / Why you hail this sacred season? / Why you link your mirth and gladness, / With the Saviour's holy name?

If to Christ all honour giving, / Are you to his glory living? / Otherwise your mirth is madness,--
You have put the Lord to shame!

O Lord raise up, we pray thee, thy power, and come among us, and with great might succour [help] us that whereas, through our sins and wickedness, we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us, thy bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be honour and glory, world without end. Amen

The Rev. Victor H. Morgan is rector of St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Blue Ridge.