

Everyone is preparing it seems. Decorating, buying gifts, sending cards to friends and far-off family members, assuring children that the day is coming and Santa will reward their good behavior, attending parties, sending year-end checks to charities, fretting that there is not enough time, especially since Thanksgiving was so late this year. We are all preparing.

But our spiritual yearnings are for a different kind of preparation, one that looks a lot like doing nothing other than being still. “Be still and know that I am God,” says the Psalmist.

I have been thinking about the church year. How everything - Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost – repeats itself year after year. We are heirs of Eternity but we are creatures of Time and we march every year through the great drama of the Divine reconciled with the Human: Today we are awaiting the miracle; in two days we will be witnessing the Godhead being incarnated into an infant; later we will watch the Epiphany star blazing forth the news through the whole world and beyond; then we will be caught up in the agony of Lent that reveals our separation from God and from one another through our own choices and illusions and leads to the despair of death, leading even – on that dreadful Friday – to the death of God; in that despair we will be awakened blinking into the dazzling sunlight of resurrection and reconciliation and the assurance that Life conquers death for us as for Christ; then we will find ourselves babbling in tongues of understanding as the fires of Pentecost transform us all into the Body of Christ; then through late spring, summer, and autumn - the months after Pentecost – we will practice how to live out the promise and the power and love. And then? Well, then we will start all over as another Advent appears. We are children of Time. And this is the way the Christian community in Time relates the narrative, the story that underlies and feeds our faith, our hope, and our love.

We do all this in the confines of Time, the Time that gives us birth, brings us through the joys and sorrows of our lives, and eventually closes our eyes and sends us off into Eternity. But we are children of that Eternity as well, and in this time-bound life we have glimpses of what is timeless. In a way, we are **always** waiting for God or seeing God being born and emblazoned forth; we are always in the despair of sin and separation, and we are always being resurrected and restored to oneness with God and each other. We are always trying, sometimes haltingly and sometimes with assurance, to live out the Pentecostal vision of redemption.

The truth is that God is always with us. The truth is also that we are not always aware of God’s presence. Our human experience of God changes as we live out our lives in Time. So we need to tell ourselves the story. Here in Advent, in order to experience the arrival of God into human history – into our own histories – we must wait, be still, prepare, anticipate. But God has always arrived; he is always arriving; he will always arrive.” “Christ **has** died,” we say in the Eucharist, the great celebration. “Christ **is** risen. Christ **will** come again.”

So in Advent, knowing that God is always here within us, we nevertheless invite Him in. Like the poet Mary Oliver, we recognize again and again that we are not worthy and that our house is not ready but that Christ will willingly be our guest.

Dear Lord, I have swept and I have washed but
still nothing is as shining as it should be
for you. Under the sink, for example, is an
uproar of mice. It is the season of their
many children. What shall I do? And under the eaves
and through the walls the squirrels
have gnawed their ragged entrances but it is the season
when they need shelter, so what shall I do? And
the raccoon limps into the kitchen and opens the cupboard
while the dog snores, the cat hugs the pillow;
what shall I do? Beautiful is the new snow falling
in the yard and the fox who is staring boldly
up the path, to the door. And still I believe you will
come, Lord: you will, when I speak to the fox,
the sparrow, the lost dog, the shivering sea-goose, know
that really I am speaking to you whenever I say,
as I do all morning and afternoon: Come in, Come in.