

Like it or not, December is a month of altered time...

Ask any child, they'll tell you,

***December is the slowest month of the year!***

Adults, however... say

***December is not nearly long enough!***

to get the shopping done,

the packages mailed

the parties, and all the preparations needed

to go to them... or to host them...

and the decorating!

the house... must be covered with lights on the outside... plus an

assortment of Santas, trains, sleighs, packages, ornaments, ice skaters,

even helicopters.

And the inside!

Lights and decorations on the tree...

Plus decorations on every flat surface

Christmas music plays in every room...

And then there's the food!

the groceries bought, the meals planned

And we do all of it in less than 30 days

While holding down jobs and taking care of families

December needs to be a 60-day month!

Did any of you notice, that in the December I just described

There was no mention of God, or Jesus,

or anything about the real celebration of Christmas?

If you listen to the world, you'll find that

Jesus is almost eliminated from Christmas

A young Jewish mother once told me

We don't celebrate Christmas; we celebrate Santa.

That may seem ridiculous, but look around  
Jesus isn't in the decorations, and the music, the spirit of the season  
Christ is replaced by rampant consumerism, enormous stress,  
and desolate loneliness  
and in the midst of the turmoil of spending and debt  
the people of God meet in worship  
seeking the peace of God.  
and find Christmas.

Christmas is not found in the darkness of Black Friday  
It's found in the light

At the beginning of the service we prayed  
***Give us grace to cast away the works of darkness,  
and put on the armor of light***

Because you see...  
The light is what we seek  
The light is what brings peace  
The light destroys the darkness  
And the light is Christ  
And he is coming... Again

That's Advent  
A four weeks dedicated to the coming of Jesus Christ  
A season of preparation... A time to get ready...  
That doesn't involve the external worldly stuff  
It's really about what's inside us...  
The hearts and minds of God's faithful people.

In the reading from Isaiah we heard

In days to come  
the mountain of the Lord's house  
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,  
and shall be raised above the hills;  
all the nations shall stream to it.  
Come, let us walk  
in the light of the LORD!

That was the prophetic voice  
The power of God would be so profound and abundant  
that no one would or could deny it

Everyone would know that God was real and alive  
Everyone would sing

*Alleluia he is coming! Alleluia he is here!*

We've had these prophecies for thousands of years  
We've heard God plead for us to live in the light  
And yet... the best Black Friday deals come in darkest night.

Even our psalm today began with an uprising of the faithful

*I was glad when they said to me,  
"Let us go to the house of the LORD."*

And I thank all of you for doing just that  
For going to the House of the Lord  
And raising your voices in prayer  
And falling on your knees to confess your sins  
And lifting your hearts to the Lord,  
Refreshed, renewed, reborn

I thank you for your willingness to get ready  
To prepare for the return of Christ  
To live into something magnificent  
Something beyond human understanding

Far too many people get ready for Christmas with *stuff*.  
And that's not like Jesus... at all...

Preparing for Christmas is turning away from the world  
And turning back toward God

Paul knew how important this was for the Roman people.  
They were *very* far from God...  
So he encouraged them and he warned them

*The night is far gone, the day is near.  
Let us then lay aside the works of darkness  
and put on the armor of light;  
let us live honorably as in the day,  
not in reveling and drunkenness,  
not in debauchery and licentiousness,  
not in quarreling and jealousy.  
Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ,  
and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.*

And if that's what December is really about  
If that's what Advent is for  
Then *all of us* need adjustments.

I once asked Kate if I could do something  
And she jokingly said  
*You're all grown up. Do whatever you want.*

And I realized, that she was right  
I can do whatever I want  
I can *buy* something... *or not*  
I can *eat* something... *or not*  
I can read, watch, listen, go, or do *whatever* I want...  
**Or not...**

We all have that same ability  
We all decide to do something... or not...

So here's an *Advent challenge...* for *all* of us  
If the second coming of Christ... was *right now*  
Would you be ready?  
If the world came to an end in the next 20 seconds  
Would you be OK with that?  
Are you absolutely, completely, without any doubt, ready?

[pause]

You don't have to answer out loud... but...  
You *know* the answer.

During this Advent season  
Why not replace consumerist activities  
With things that will *really* prepare us for Christmas

Why not replace shopping for gifts  
With the gift of service to others

Why not replace ordering over the phone  
With phoning shut-ins

Why not replace resentment... with forgiveness

Why not replace sin... with confession...

In our Gospel reading... Jesus said

*You do not know on what day your Lord is coming.*

No one does.

There's an old song by Curtis Mayfield

That's become my personal advent anthem

*People get ready there's a train comin'*

*You don't need no baggage, just get on board*

*All you need is faith to hear the diesels hummin'*

*You don't need no ticket, just thank the Lord*

There *is* a train a comin'

And I have *no idea* when

No one does

No one.

So people...

Let's get ready...

Find ways to break the bondage of commercial Christmas

Find a new path to the birth of our savior

Share the true meaning of Advent with others

Show the world that we are not just Christmas and Easter people

But *Advent people*

Committed to waiting...

Patiently

Confidently

Peacefully

William James got it... he wrote...

*I am done with great things and big success,  
and I am for those tiny invisible molecular moral forces that work  
through the crannies of the world  
like so many rootlets,  
or like the capillary of oozing water,  
yet which, if you give them time,  
will rend the hardest monuments of man's pride.*

There is a way to break through...

Small moments... tiny changes... over time... Advent time...

George Wilcox found it...

He wrote...

*I am an archeologist of the ordinary, the everyday,  
digging around in the mundane,  
often overlooked matters of my daily rounds,  
alert to shards of divine mystery  
poking out of the ground right before my eyes.  
Once unearthed,  
I seek to piece them together to see the pattern they produce.*

There is a way to break through...

Small moments... tiny changes... over time... Advent time...

And we *will*... be ready.