

What to expect when we're not distracted

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November 24, 2015

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To hear Andy Williams tell it, right now is the most wonderful time of year. It is also the most frantic and maddening time of year. We've commenced our shopping, decorating, and planning for the "best Christmas ever." Or maybe we're completely stressed and wringing our hands because we have no idea how we'll pull it off this year.

Church leaders aren't exempt from the frenetic pace by any means, because we've had Advent on our brains for some time already. We juggle the expectations of our congregations, the extra services and cantatas, the influx of worshipers who we may see only around this time of year. And oh yes, we have to plan our menus, do our shopping, and deck our halls like everyone else in our parish, too.

It's the most distracting time of the year.

We spend so much of Advent preparing for Christmas that we forget to prepare for Christ's arrival. We neglect to prepare for the coming of the Lord and to consider what that means. We fail to stop and examine the existing paradigms and how they will be shifted and toppled at the Messiah's arrival.

In Luke's gospel, Jesus talks about the signs in nature and the widespread trembling that will precede the Son of Man's arrival. It doesn't sound too far off from what's happening in our world. The environment is literally changing before our eyes. Trembling is hardly in short supply.

Are we too distracted to pay attention to the signs? When the Son of Man comes, will we be caught unawares, encumbered by the banalities of life? Will we have checked out completely, content to devote our attention to the distractions? Will we be looking instead for the things that will help us forget that wars still rage, racism still persists, and children are still shot in the streets?

Jesus' eschatological discourse in Luke's gospel is a call to pay attention--something we sorely need in these early days of Advent. At the onset of this season of expectation, we're called to remember what it is we're expecting. If the Son of Man is to come, he's coming to change some things. What does this mean for the single mom who works 50 hours a week and is as stressed every month trying to figure out how to pay for groceries as she is this month trying to pay for Christmas gifts? What does this mean for the immigrant family trapped in a detention center?

What exactly are we looking toward? When the Son of Man comes and our redemption is at hand, what will this mean? What needs redeeming--what can no longer persist because it is at odds with a just and loving Savior?

Perhaps these are more pertinent and urgent Advent considerations than what songs to include in this year's hymn sing.