

Getting through Advent

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Time

to do the Advent thing, I thought last Saturday night as my husband and I prepared to study the Annunciation passage with an adult ed class. My mind went to the hope that I'd be able to get away for a day or two this Advent season and do some hiking, reflection and prayer at a retreat center. My husband thought of the teen parents who use our church for a social services class--he wanted to propose that members of the adult class prepare a Christmas party for the teens.

But,

as often happens in this class, our discussion of Advent had little to do with our lesson plans. The teaching-and the learning-came from the class.

The

question, "What do you want to have happen this Advent?" brought out these comments:

"I

lost both my mom and my sister this year," Jane said softly. "I don't like thinking about it."

"My

father-in-law just lost his foot to diabetes," said Bill.

We

had walked through the last years of Laura's struggle to keep her alcoholic son Joe alive; then we'd kept her company at his funeral. "I'm worried about Joe's wife Anne," she said, referring to her daughter-in-law. "She's an alcoholic too, and she's not handling his death well."

Although

he did not speak, we knew that Merv's mother-in-law had just been diagnosed

with pervasive cancer, and that his father was on oxygen support.

And

then this came from Marilyn: "My husband and I are divorcing. Christmas is up for grabs. How do we celebrate any of it?"

There

were two suggestions. Sarah turned to Marilyn and said that, since both husband and wife are Christians, they must make the effort to be in worship together with their young son. Then Heidi delivered the punch: she added that maybe we should all just "keep coming" to worship; that is, we should all move through Advent together, aim to survive the grotesque giddiness that is secular Christmas, and wait together for Easter.