

"Well," said Pooh, "what I like best," and then he had to stop and think. Because although eating honey was a very good thing to do, there was a moment just before you began to eat it which was better than when you were, but he didn't know what it was called.

We need to thank A. A. Milne for that great image of what the joy of anticipation looks like.

In common usage the word advent speaks to the arrival of a notable event or person. As the first season of the church year, it reminds us of and helps us prepare for the celebration Christ's arrival. Although I think all other seasons remind us of the cycle of life, this one speaks especially to newness - this is a time of preparation and anticipation.

Advent re-signals us that hope (or perhaps, help) is on the way...

It can be characterized by a fidgety, can't wait, type of anticipation that we felt as children on the evening before we opened gifts on Christmas morning. I remember that our daughter always made us wait to put gifts under the tree until after she went to bed - I think it increased her joy of anticipation.

But I think Advent might also contain some frustration, maybe even vague feelings of dread...What if tomorrow doesn't hold everything we hoped for?

When we wait, it's pretty tempting to bring the past into the present as we look to the future. What if I'm disappointed...again...it's a kind of anticipatory disappointment. A protective reflex to think that next year might not be exactly what we wish for...or maybe, unfortunately, it will...

So advent, like every other time when we stand, literally or metaphorically, on the brink of the unknown, is a promise, but still the unknown. It's a liminal time...like the time that separates being awake from being asleep, day from night...the itch before the satisfying sneeze.

This time before, is still a time a time of great anticipation.

It's also a soft season, not ordinary, not boring, but not a lot of hooah, either...maybe a daily calendar to focus us on the story, or a weekly lighting of a new candle, a quiet service, a meditative time...a bit of introspection. But certainly not the fire of pentecost, the sparkling brilliance of the transfiguration, the deep reflection of lent, the despair of good friday, or the exuberant joy of easter morning. Regardless...despite its calm demeanor, Advent

is a time of facing the new and perhaps unknown, breaking or at least examining the habits of the past, looking for the potential...a time of hope

So what are we waiting for?

Although I think that the cycle of the church year is useful, especially in reminding us of both the cycles of our own lives, and those of life itself, I sometimes think that it's unfortunate that we know how this story ends...

I'd like to suggest that we not follow the dramatist's advice to willingly suspend our disbelief, maybe we should willingly suspend our belief...our certainty...as we celebrate each year in the weeks that lead up to Christmas...

When we hear the words from Luke, "And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed" and fall into the comfortable memories and rituals of years past...maybe we ought to pause, to think about what it is we're waiting for...

I'd like to suggest that we might use this time to remind ourselves that our lives might be ones of living in imitation of the Christ whose birth we are anticipating...that we look to finding

our own, personal, perhaps new ways of following the example of the Christ Child. Maybe the ritual and the known can provide a comfortable framework, but maybe we can ask, what does it truly mean to follow this child?

How can we get better at being inclusive, and welcoming, and forgiving, and helpful..at being respectful and non-judgemental...at listening instead of talking...at knowing and honoring other's stories and traditions and struggles...how can we be giving of ourselves without expectation...especially when when we cross paths and ideas with those with whom we disagree...those who make our blood pressure rise...those who we'd really love to hate...

I'm hoping that these last days of Advent can serve as a gentle reminder that we must get out of our heads, out of our personal stories...to be motivated our hearts...and focused our lives on doing...at least as much as on believing - the oft referred to orthopraxy instead of orthodoxy.

So...a few more thoughts...

Tomorrow is also the solstice...a time when even the sun seems to stand still...perhaps these final days of advent can also be a time of standing still for each of us...a self-stice?...of time of

quiet, and of knowing...perhaps our times spiritual darkness will also begin to shorten.

Maybe we can see through the fog of everyday life to address the question Mary Oliver asked so well... "Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?"

So in honor of the anticipated nativity, perhaps we can indulge in a bit of joyful dreaming, or as Kelley Dinkelmeyer's sharing of an Edwin Louis Cole quote on Facebook a couple of weeks ago said...how can we see that "Expectancy is the atmosphere for miracle."

I think advent can also be a time of thinking about the astounding miracle of birth...the something out of almost nothing. The joy of a new life, one that will live an unknown number of days, and will influence an unknown number of folks. The joyful dreaming we all do at the birth of a new child...

...and what a child!