

Silent Season, Still Season

We need to recover the true meaning of the Christmas Season! Christmas has been corrupted by the all busy-ness that overwhelms our lives in December.

USER ALERT!!

This pastor's column has been interrupted for your safety by the Quality Control Division of the General Board of Discipleship, using a key word analysis to determine that your pastor is about to launch into a dull diatribe against secular commercialism at Christmastime. Pastoral rants against secular commercialization have recently been listed by OSHA as a serious workplace safety hazard and by the CDC as a significant cause of injury or death, inasmuch as they are so trite and irritating that they cause people to drive angrily, pick fights with strangers, and push little old ladies into the street. If the problem persists, you may need to reset your pastor.

Um, sorry. But actually I wasn't talking about what the secular world has done to Christmas. Yes, that's bad. But why should we get bent out of shape about it? what difference does it make to us, as we celebrate the Incarnation of Christ, if Wal-Mart is flooding the airwaves with commercials? You have a mute button. Why should disciples of the Lord Jesus worry about whether Sears says "Merry Christmas" or "Happy Holidays." The Kingdom of God has never depended on how it's represented by Sears Corp., anyway.

No, I was talking about us. The Church. The people on whom the kingdom of a god actually does depend. It has often occurred to me that we can be nearly as frantic in our Advent activities as the shopping mall is in their door-buster sales. It's as if we're trying to beat the retail sector at its own game. And if that's what we're trying to do, we *will* fail.

So here's my suggestion for Advent. In all our busy-ness (both commercial and church-related), practice being still. Make time periodically to turn out the lights, sit in silence, and look into a fire. (If you have no fire, Christmas tree lights can be almost as good.) When shopping, pause now and then to have a cup of coffee or tea, and while you sip it, watch the people pass by. Pray for them. Assuming it snows before Christmas, take a walk in the snow and listen to the incredible silence of a snowy day. Read a poem that has nothing to do with Christmas. Listen to music that has no jingle-bell component. Hold hands with someone you love.

I'm not saying to give up all activity. Some Christmas activity is joyous: finding the right gift for a sister, going to an Advent party at church, preparing for and enjoying a Lessons and Carols service (Dec 15), enjoying our children in the Christmas program (Dec. 22), and meditating on the Word Become Flesh in our Christmas Eve services. All these can be wonderful. But first, make sure you've taken time to be still.

After all, this season we celebrate the Prince of Peace.

