

I was a late convert to projecting words and music during worship. I adopted it first because, to the extent that we can draw people younger than fifty, they are more used to reading from a screen than from a book or bulletin, but I became reasonably enthusiastic when I discovered one of the things I could do combining *media* other than text and . . .

Well, let me explain. Preparing what are from habit and convention called “slides” for Sunday worship has definitely added to my pre-projecting work load. My standard tasks include “copying” Scripture readings or prayers from, say, a Microsoft Word document on my computer, and “pasting” it onto slides in Keynote, the Apple version of Microsoft’s ubiquitous PowerPoint program, then changing the font size, adding more blank slides to accommodate the space needed for the words copied, and so on. Because the Scriptures are repeated every three years, as of a few weeks ago, I have almost three complete years of slides, which means I can now begin to save some time by going back to a comparable worship service at this point in the Lectionary cycle three years ago for most of the Scripture readings. So for today, while I had to adjust font sizes and do some moving around of text, it was easier than starting from scratch as I had been doing: I modified some slides from the First Sunday in Advent in 2013 (which was before we had the video screens).

And lo and behold, though I did so after I thought I knew what my meditation would be and had set its title, I have to say I got a kick out of how I had used our Scriptures with *media* that Sunday:

[. ]

That was the incomparable Louis Prima, if you did not recognize him, but the song, “Enjoy Yourself, It’s Later than You Think” -- specifically the “It’s Later than You Think” part, -- I think clearly ties into both the Gospel reading with which we opened worship and the reading from Romans that will serve as our benediction.

“it’s later than you think,” as Paul writes and as we shall read a bit later, “because by now our salvation is nearer than when we first began to believe”; and he, like Jesus in our Gospel reading, tells us that it is time to wake up!

*“[B]ecause by now our salvation is nearer than when we first began to believe,”* so it is time to wake up, though at times perhaps we need to set our alarms to do so.

I had included with Louis Prima another slide very coincident in topic, “Christianity at risk of dying out in a generation,” according to a recent Archbishop of Canterbury. I am not sure exactly what I had to say then. I keep the texts of all my sermons, but I do not tend to re-read them, because I am afraid of doing to my sermons what I have been accusing the Pope of doing with them, *plagiarizing them*. This week, a headline in the daily email from “Christianity Today” raised a related question, “Does Protestantism Need to Die?” Yikes.

Yet I think that *waking up*, because it is *later than we think* in terms of not allowing faith to be suffocated by the secular and material and the ultimately-not-ultimate concerns of the world, is an appropriate way to begin this Advent season.

And I think we need to focus on Advent, not at the cost of ignoring the event that ends it, the Christmas event, but rather because focusing on preparing for the arrival of the Lord might also focus us on the fact that Jesus comes into the world not just for us, but for all, and we truly need to “prepare the way,” not prepare the way for Him to come, but prepare the way, find a way or ways, to get others to come to Him, or to make it difficult for them to avoid Him as He seeks to come to them.

In other words, Advent does, *I believe*, ask not simply that we prepare for our own Christmases, but prepare, explore, search, you give me the verb, ways for Jesus to enter the world of those who do not know Him and perhaps misunderstand or who are indifferent to Him and to what he brings, so that they, too, might wake up, wake up from

innocence — a polite and proper way of saying “lack of knowledge or understanding” — wake up from innocence of who Jesus is and of what he can do for *their* lives!

" . . . of *what he can do for their lives!*" I had a delightful conversation over the phone with a young man this week, who asked a truly serious question that others have asked: “Consider Gandhi, who lived a highly ethical life but was not a Christian; is he in hell?”

Most of you know part of my answer, “No; I do not believe in hell,” but the other part was this: “I believe in trying to introduce people to Jesus *not* because of concern over what will happen to them when they die, that is work that Jesus can handle, and beside, ‘who am I to know what happens between God and the soul of a dead person?’” No, I want people to know Jesus, because I believe it makes a change in our lives right here and now when we are able to have — when we choose — faith in Him! All of life is a sort of Advent until that moment when we are able to say, “Wow, God; my life is changed,” for that means Jesus has come and a personal Advent is over.

For life does change when we say “yes,” and accept God’s love.

And that might be not just a matter of setting an alarm to wake us, but also a matter of disarming intrusion alarms that keep God’s love shown in the Christmas event from entering our lives . . .

And our mission call as Christians, as the Church of Jesus Christ, is to find a way to disarm those intrusion alarms in those who do not know him.

“How?” Certainly do not argue politics — not kidding, — but do not *argue* for faith, but let your faith show in your behavior to others so that they are, indeed, disarmed.

I have not used it all that often lately, but when you encounter the mother struggling to handle her unruly children when you are in the checkout lane — I am not going to give Walmart a plug this time, — remember that you may indeed be the way that she will

encounter Jesus Christ for the first time, so show understanding and sympathy and a smile.

. . . and do not forget that we never quite know Him perfectly, our own Advents are never quite ended; you can encounter Him in that mother -- if your intrusion alarm is disarmed.

It's later — and He is nearer — than you think; Christ is as near as the person sitting next to you — even sitting next to you in church.

Amen