

It is nearly Christmas. The evidence is all around – Christmas carols, decorations and preparations in our homes, in our churches and in the mall. That is not a bad thing. But we are also still in Advent. I want us to consider the deep and holy longing that is a part of this season. It is significant that the words of the prophets and the yearning of Israel in exile are so prominent in the lessons appointed for this season. The people longed for the Lord to come, to act, to redeem them, to take them home. They lived in Babylon, but their hearts were not there.

I think Advent is that way for us. As Lutherans, we do not withdraw from the world but engage it believing that it is a gift. But we also know that it is not quite right, that there is brokenness and pain – the pain we experience, the pain others cause, the pain we cause others.

In some ways Advent creates a certain restlessness. It may be one of the few seasons of the year when we become more aware of our longing for wholeness and more alert to the signs that something is approaching. This Advent longing is an awareness that apart from God we are not whole. We find ourselves in the unsettled and restless time between the ending of the old year and the beginning of the new. A thin place where heaven and earth seem to touch, where we draw near to God realizing, as St. Augustine wrote, “You have formed us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You.”

We can't get there by ourselves, and here is the promise and hope of Christmas – the one for whom we long is not content to draw us but fulfills this promise by coming to us as Emmanuel, God with us. In the incarnate Christ, God comes to us, finds us and gives our restless hearts rest.

Merry Christmas, dear church.



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Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



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God's work. Our hands.