

Dear Friends,

Yesterday I had a powerful experience of how the media shapes us without our knowledge. I went to bed and the last thing I heard on television was “I hope you got out there and did something good this ‘Giving Tuesday.’” Immediately I scanned my day...what did I do today? Wrote part of a hymn, did some planning for Advent, had a “Love Light” Meeting, and then thought, oh phew, I did cook and bring lunch to the wreath makers, but maybe there is still time also to make a donation to something. Then I realized what I was doing. I was letting the mainstream media determine how I felt about my day. Not only that, I was accepting someone’s idea of how my time should be shaped. Not only by me, but by everyone. Black Friday, Small Business Saturday, Cyber Monday, and Giving Tuesday. At least Sunday was left alone. Oh no, it wasn’t. It was “Football Sunday in America!”

Now, I have nothing against a day dedicated to giving. In fact, I have nothing against all days dedicated to giving. But I do have a problem with any day being labeled and shaped simply according to the whims and needs of the economy. I am certain that I don’t even know the half of how it happens. None of us does. Except the few experts whose job it is to manipulate our feelings and our minds.



As I am writing this, between the hours of six and seven this morning, an unspeakably beautiful sunrise is taking place in the windows to my right. I keep calling to Joel who is in the living room – “Look at this.” And five minutes later, “Look at this again!” He has books sitting in his lap, and every time I call, he groans as he has to get out from under the pile, and then rearrange them again. But every time he looks out the window, he exclaims “Wow!”

I think the message of the morning is this. We have decisions to make every day. Our feelings, attitudes, even our activities can be shaped by the ever screaming media which is more and more shaped by the commercial priorities of the rich and powerful. Or we can choose to let them be shaped in other ways. By not turning on the television or computer in the morning, by not getting right down to business, and instead attending to the sunrise, to the birds, to whatever is weighing on or singing in your heart.

Another way we can choose to shape our experience with others is by attending to time as kept by the church. Instead of being shaped by commerce, our days can be shaped by the life of Christ. The liturgical year is, like any calendar, a time-shaping tool meant to shape our priorities, our activities, our minds and hearts. Attending to it, like attending to the secular calendar, is a choice. The choice makes all the difference in the world about the persons we become and how we operate in the world.

The new liturgical year starts on this Sunday with the beginning of Advent. The emphases in this season are very different than that of a consumer Christmas. It is all about preparation, inner preparation to receive Christ into our hearts, outer preparation to find ways to make the world one in which such unconditional love can be the center of life for all the earth. It is about increasing our longings to make this happen in the world and thus increasing our motivation and activity in the name of justice, peace, and joy! The church is not just a building we go to to pray, it is a community of people choosing to be shaped in a different way with one another for the sake of the world. As pastors our job is to constantly point out what God may be doing in the world, like pointing out the sunrise, so that we all might say “Wow!”, and go about our day differently.

Please remember, if we don’t make the choice of **how** we want to live, someone else will happily make it for us. So let us choose this Advent season to be moved by the miracles that God provides every day that we might shine with the light of Christ in some dark places.

A blessed Advent to all,

Kate