

Rejoice? Don't worry? (Philippians 4:4-7)

It's hard to take Paul's admonition seriously these days.

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Advent is about Christ appearing, coming. It's about God showing up and keeping his promises, not disappointing us like an unfaithful spouse or an irresponsible parent or a friend who ghosts us.

During Advent we are attentive, our eyes peeled for any indication of God's coming. Scripture and history are filled with witnesses throughout the ages who testify to God's trustworthiness and to the reality that God appears in a thousand different ways, in the mundane goings-on of our lives and in the world.

As Paul reminds us, "the Lord is near." God is always near enough to be found and to find us—even in our darkest night. But perhaps we are weak in faith, or tired, or sick, or doubting. Maybe we are weary and wary. Perhaps we do not quite believe anymore, even though we want to—the problem of evil is too much. It could be that we have convinced ourselves that God appears and is attentive to others but not to us. How on earth can Paul tell us to "rejoice in the Lord always" and not to be "anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving," to bring our requests to God? It seems unrealistic and incredible.

But then I think about how Paul wrote these things from prison.

Truth be told, I too sometimes find myself in a hole during Advent. Where I live, the dark and dreary days of Advent contribute to a sapping of hope and energy,

especially when I am forced to stay inside because of the cold—away from people and away from nature. What is to be done when we are not feeling the Advent spirit and cannot rejoice or live close to anxiety-free, as Paul exhorts us?

I offer no formula, but here are a few things I try to do:

- I express my feelings to trusted others. I confess the state I am in.
- I phone a friend.
- I force myself to come up with five things I am thankful for.
- I do the Ignatian Examen.
- I recall God's faithfulness to me and to others.
- I do spiritual reading—Scripture, books, devotionals.
- I surround myself with beauty, which draws me to God.
- I go outside if possible, as often as possible, even when it is blistering cold. Being outside jars me awake to reality and to the world outside of myself.
- I keep my eyes peeled for traces of God.
- I pay close attention to the mirth of children, especially my daughters.
- I try to take my eyes off myself by engaging in service to others.
- I watch videos that make me laugh and try to think about what Jesus might have laughed at and about what might make God laugh now.
- I listen to sermons by Christians from different traditions.
- I listen to how God is present in the lives of others.
- I listen to beautiful music.
- I go on a date with my husband.

What helps you anticipate and see God's coming during Advent, especially when it's hard to sense God's presence?