

## **“Undelayed Delivery”**

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Congregational Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts  
August 21, 2022 – Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost  
Jeremiah 1:4-10; Luke 13:10-17

In the unprecedented, pandemic times in which we find ourselves living, our new normal is to live with lots of delays. The pandemic has caused all kinds of problems with supply chains, impacting every element of them, from materials to manufacturing to transportation to distribution. Every link in the chain it seems has become a weak link, and once efficient and resilient systems that functioned smoothly have become rickety and creaky at best and completely seized up and non-functioning at worst. This has all led us to experience shortages and delays, with things that were once readily available in abundance becoming scarce and hard to find or receive.

Still, in these pandemic days of delays, there are some things you can get delivered almost immediately. You can still order a pizza and have it delivered in less than an hour. You can purchase groceries online or through an app and see them arrive at your home within a couple hours. Many items available at a major online retailer whose name rhymes with clam-athon are available for same-day delivery, and those that aren't can usually be dropped off by someone in a truck with a smiley face on the side within a couple of days.

Such is the new normal of our strange times, in which some things that were once easy to get are now hard to find and other things that once took time and effort to get can now easily arrive at your front door in a flash.

In today's lesson from the gospel of Luke, we are offered a story about a person, who, living in her own unprecedented times, also experienced the strangeness of experiencing both a delayed and immediate delivery. In our lesson from the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of Luke, we are told that Jesus was teaching in a synagogue one Sabbath day when a woman who had lived with a debilitating condition for 18 long years appeared. When Jesus saw her, he immediately paused his work of teaching to do the work of healing, and with his touch, the woman was instantly free from her ailment. As she stood up straight for the first time in 18 years, she praised God for the immediate -- but delayed -- delivery.

There was one person at the synagogue, however, that would have preferred for her delivery to be delayed at least one more day. The leader of the synagogue, we are told, did not praise God that someone had been healed, but chastised Jesus for doing the work of healing on the Sabbath. For the leader, the day was to be a holy day of rest, on which no work -- including healing -- was to be done. But Jesus, as he had done before and would do again, saw the Sabbath not as a day to do nothing, but as a special day to engage in the work of renewal for oneself and others. For Jesus, the Sabbath was *the perfect day* for a healing, just as it was a perfect day for teaching, and so the deliverance of the afflicted woman would not be delayed one day longer.

In the moment of her delivery, though the leader of the assembly stewed in indignant anger, the healed woman praised God and the gathered crowd rejoiced, making that Sabbath all the holier as a day for deliverance and thanksgiving, for liberation and celebration.

Here we are, gathered on this Lord's Day, the day after the Sabbath, and we too can make this day holier -- more special -- day not by doing nothing on it, but by doing the work that leads us and others to experience liberation and renewal. By doing work that leads us or others to experience deliverance and by praising God for the liberation of bodies, minds, and spirits, we make the day sacred.

So let us make this day holier by being healed of our own afflictions and carrying on Jesus' work of setting others free, for we are being delivered ourselves that we might be deliverers of others. And let us continue to make our community -- and the place where we gather -- one where we prioritize above maintaining our old traditions the deliverance and well-being of people now. In so doing, we make our community more sacred and this place where we gather a more holy place.

We make our place a holier place when it becomes more accessible to all, which is why we are working now to install a restroom on this floor that can be used by all. We make our worship holier when our celebration of liberation is extended more liberally to all, which is why we are continuing to take more steps toward allowing more people to be included in our worship. We now have large print bulletins available for those who live with impaired vision. This month, we are installing an assisted listening system in the sanctuary to enable those who have impaired hearing to more easily participate in our worship. And this is why we will be

continuing to providing access to our services for people who are unable to worship with us in person by offering video streams on YouTube and Facebook, which are captioned, even live, by running our services on StonehamTV, and by having them accessible even by telephone (I know that at least a couple of you are listening in right now!). These are not inconveniences for any of us, but opportunities for all of us to expand our celebration of God's grace as a community where all are welcome and included.

And the sooner we can become even more welcoming and inclusive the better, for *today is the day* to do God's work that delivers people! We are called to do God's work in the moment and we have been made ready for this by God, just as the prophet Jeremiah was called to do God's work from before his birth and made ready to do God's work even in his youth. All that we have experienced in our lifetimes, especially the times when we have faced adversity, can be used by God to prepare us -- no matter who we are or where we are on life's journey -- to more faithfully proclaim God's life-giving message of love and to do God's work that heals. So let us do our job on this sacred day. Let us do the work of liberation on every day and so make each holy. Let us give God thanks for setting us free and let us praise God when we witness God's liberating touch blessing others. Amen.