

“Delivered from Disturbance”

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts
December 24, 2023 - Fourth Sunday of Advent

[2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Luke 1:26-38](#)

Christmas is almost here! You can smell it in the air with fragrant Christmas trees and wreaths now on display all around us. You can hear that Christmas is almost here with seasonal music being played in shops, stores, and homes. You can taste it in the peppermint mochas, apple cinnamon cakes, and other tasty treats offered just for the season. You can see it with impressive light displays, giant inflatables, and classic plastic Santas everywhere.

And one tell-tale sign that Christmas is almost upon us is the rapid crescendo in the amount of deliveries we have been receiving, with the ever-present stream of delivery trucks -- UPS trucks, Fedex trucks, Amazon trucks, United States Postal Service trucks -- all going to and fro, dropping off items at our homes and workplaces, turning into a raging river. We've seen an especially huge inflow of deliveries over the course of the last couple of weeks here at the church due to the receipt of hundreds items for the Christmas toy drive in addition to many generous donations for the food pantry. The deliveries of gifts, food items, and, of course, greeting cards have come fast and furious.

I do have to tell you all about one of the many items recently delivered to Christine and me at our home, related to a sermon I offered here a couple of weeks ago, during which I mentioned that I had never received an Advent greeting card and wondered what it might look like. Delivered in the mail came a card custom-made by a couple of our church members, Sandra and Lee, not for Christmas, but for Advent. This amazing, delightful Advent card includes a seasonally appropriate wish for growth as we seek light and an image of locust-and-honey-eating John the Baptist looking a little wild and crazy in his camel-hair coat. So now I know what an Advent greeting card looks like, and this beauty is going to be displayed upon our home's mantle, as it has been over the last few days of Advent, throughout the coming Christmas season as well.

I hope that you've also had received some wonderful deliveries recently -- if not an Advent card, perhaps a slew of Christmas cards from friends or family

members, pictures showing how children have grown over the course of the last year, or the annual family news update -- that have helped to put you in the holiday spirit as we get ready for Christmas.

Hopefully, over the course of this Advent season, you have received deliveries from God as well, messages and signs reminding you of God's real presence in your life, God's unbound love for you, or God's calling for you to angelically deliver messages of love to your neighbor. And I hope that you continue to pay attention to these deliveries from God as they come to us not only in Advent, or at Christmas, but are freely offered throughout the year, for -- rain, sleet, shine, or snow -- God always delivers.

We heard about one kind of divine delivery in our lesson from 2 Samuel, which gives us a story about how David, King of Israel, was finally resting in his fine house after a lifetime of fighting to establish a kingdom, when he exclaimed that he was going to build a permanent, fine house for God, a temple, so that God could rest as well and no longer reside in a temporary tent or tabernacle, as David imagined God had done from the time of Moses. God then delivered a message to David, through the prophet Nathan, clarifying that God didn't really need to be delivered from homelessness, for God is never boxed in and will remain unbound and uncontrolled, unlike the gods of so many of Israel's neighbors in their temples who are manipulated through the offering of sacrifices and other religious rituals. Israel's God, will, however deliver God's people in times of distress, not because God has been given a fancy house or is properly worshipped there, but because God loves them and is faithful to them. And God reminds David that just as God had delivered him and his people from danger in the past, God would continue to do so, and would make for David a house, not of cedar, but a household of descendants, who would deliver God's blessings to the whole world.

We heard in our gospel lesson that one of those descendants, Mary of Nazareth, also received a delivery from God, a message from the angel Gabriel that she would carry and deliver a living message of God's love in a holy child who would bring an eternal reign of God's unbound love to all people. Like her aged cousin Elizabeth, who would miraculously give birth to John, the camel-hair-coat-wearing baptizer; and her ancestor Sarah, who, long before, had miraculously given birth in her old age to Isaac; Mary would also miraculously deliver a child who would

bring deliverance for people. God, who is unboxed and unbound and has made the impossible possible, would again deliver a miracle of deliverance through her.

God, who has always been in the deliverance delivery business, is still at work today, making possible the impossible. Through Mary's child, we were given one who would show us the way to miraculously change the world through love, and when we let the loving way of Christ be our way, we are delivered from our brokenness and we share God's gift of deliverance with our broken world.

Today, the world is in need of deliverance. Not far from the once little town Bethlehem, where Jesus was born, war is raging, and with it has come death, famine, disease, and all kinds of suffering for millions of people. We are disturbed by unrest and violence in Palestine and in many other places in our world, including many of our own homes and communities. We pray for God the deliverer to deliver us again, to make peace, which seems so impossible, possible. Through the loving way of Christ, we work for deliverance from disturbance and destruction to be with all of God's beloved children around the world.

O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel. Amen.