



The Rev. Emily Williams Guffey, Rector
Fourth Sunday of Advent
December 20, 2020

Readings: 2 Samuel 7, Romans 16: 24-27
Psalm: 89
Gospel: Luke 1:26-38

Last night would have been the 45th annual caroling party at my parents' house, begun in 1975 when they were, if not mere babies, then at least recent graduates of the Wayne State University Music Department. It began as a Christmas party among friends. And when you get musicians together you know that it leads to singing...singing carols and even repertoire like *The Hallelujah Chorus*...and throughout its annual evolutions has come to include my friends and my sister's friends and their parents and our neighbors and our co-workers. And it is for me the tradition that defines Christmas, especially those few moments when we sing *The Hallelujah Chorus* in our living room.

The absence of gathering, of course, this year leaves a void. It is very strange and, at best, disorienting. And we all have our traditions that we are missing very greatly in this season. There is a chasm between where we should be, what we should be doing, with whom we should be gathering, and what is actually able to happen.

We mind this gap by sharing memories and photos and hopes for the future, by making calls and dropping off food and attending to and praying for one another, and it helps. It really, really does.

We might be finding that to love is to stretch along this gap between our expectations and reality as far as we can. And in these days, with the help of science and digital technology, we can stretch much farther than we previously had been able to, even much farther than we had thought possible...virtual gatherings, Zoomsgiving, a vaccine that is here.

And for now, and for a while yet...it still really hurts.

After all, by another name, love with nowhere to go is called *grief*.

We grieve that which we delight in and depend on and which is absent or strained right now. We grieve those we love who are not with us physically.

We hear today that nothing is impossible with God. And we might ask, *"Really?! If nothing is impossible with God, then why are we in this mess? If all things are possible with God, then couldn't God possibly restore us and our world?"*

Christ Church Detroit
960 East Jefferson Avenue, Detroit, MI 48207
313-259-6688 | www.christcd.org

Why is this virus claiming so many of our loved ones?
Why must we even grieve in isolation?
Why are our work lives upended?
Why do some have enough, and some have far too little?

Why are our homes either far too full — a single swirling vortex of school and work and chores and living, a maddening volume of activity that absolutely exceeds the bounds of such limited of space and time — or far too empty, void of work and income, of good health, of meaningful things to do and of the loved ones we cherish viscerally, their absence echoing as if from an abyss. And the silence is deafening.

We might echo, on this 4th Sunday of Advent, Mary's retort to Gabriel's promise of a bright future: *"That can't be. I've seen how it goes. It doesn't work that way."*

I wonder if Mary thought or even said (not everything was written down): *"And if it does work that way, if I do carry God's child whatever that means, then nobody will believe me. Joseph will leave me, I will be exiled from our community and, as a teenage unmarried woman, there will be nothing I can do to change that situation."*

I wonder if Mary calculated the expectations — her own expectations and the many placed upon her — that she would lose if this were to happen. I wonder if, all in that moment, she anticipated the fall from Grace that she would experience.

For it is only when the Angel Gabriel mentions the good news that her Cousin Elizabeth is experiencing (Elizabeth who had been trying for years to carry a child and is now six months' pregnant) that Mary begins to see...begins to see that grace is all she has...is all we have.

This is, with God's promise and Mary's ultimate thoughtful prayerful daring bold uncertain faithful 'Yes,' the most abundant conversation in the history of the world some have said. And I agree.

For it is really actually viscerally physically true that God visits us in our grief, in the chasms that we, you and I, inhabit right now between our expectations and our reality.

God comes to dwell with us not in our plenitude, not in everything that we have, not in what we don't have, not in our perfection. God dwells with us in our lonely bodies aching for love and connection.

God meets us in our tumbling vortex of despair and change and turns it into nothing less than a womb of new birth.

The Holy One is in our midst. The Lord God is very, very near to us and loves us very, very, very much...more than we can see.

And this Holy One is ready to labor, with us, new hope into being.

Christ Church Detroit
960 East Jefferson Avenue, Detroit, MI 48207
313-259-6688 | www.christcd.org