

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

SUNDAY DECEMBER 1, 2019

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“Unlock, Detach, Release”

Based on Luke 3:1-18

“The whole tenor of advent is that God may act in us, through us, beyond us, more than we imagined, because newness is on its way among us.”
(Brueggemann 5)

Unlock, detach, release. Sounds more like instructions for moving the Canada Arm on the International Space Station, than instructions for the beginning of Advent.

We worship today, in an unfamiliar place: one foot firmly grounded in the whirlwind and ramping up of Christmas activities, parties, presents and parades, while our other foot gingerly steps into what is a new season, a new year, for the Christian thinker. We are beginning to feel the tug of the star of Bethlehem beckon us forward, but we are detached enough, still, that our minds move to other things. If astronomers announced today on the national news, that a new calculation of the earth's rotation around the sun means that a correction in our monthly calendar was required, that Christmas was

going to be three weeks later this year, we are still detached enough from the stable, that we could adjust our schedules, and say, “OK, I can live with that.” That same news will not be so easily received, three weeks from now.

**“I BAPTIZE
YOU
WITH WATER.
BUT ONE WHO
IS MORE
POWERFUL
THAN I WILL
COME, THE
STRAPS OF
WHOSE
SANDALS I AM
NOT WORTHY
TO UNTIE. HE
WILL BAPTIZE
YOU
WITH THE
HOLY SPIRIT
AND FIRE.
~LUKE 3:16**

Unlock, detach, release. John the Baptist was known to be a blunt, perhaps aggressive prophet: passionate about paving the way, and sowing seeds of spiritual life, so that when Jesus arrived, ears

would be listening, and hearts would be ready. He had little patience for those who hid behind ‘churchy’ words or practices; those who intentionally took more than their share, or turned a blind eye on those in need. “You know what to do,” he said to the smaller crowd that remained after the cutting,
“You brood of vipers!” (v7)

“Unlock yourself from the tried and true phrases that you have allowed yourself to speak, so that you may feel justified in your bad behavior and tacit nod to your faith. Detach your hearts from coldness and bitterness and resignation. Release your spirit so that it may be caught up in a newness of thinking and fresh air of true faith.” “Why?” the crowd asked.

*“Because, there is
“One who is more powerful
than I [that] will come,” (v16)*

and He shall make the

*“Crooked roads straight, and
the rough ways smooth.”
(Isaiah 40:4)*

Unlock, detach, release.

- We are challenged in this season of many distractions, memories, and festivities, to unlock ourselves

from what holds us back from being drawn into the Christmas story once again.

- We are challenged to detach ourselves from cynicism that can come with the season, and a familiar story we have heard so many times before.
- We are challenged to release our spirit to the whisper of Bethlehem, with one foot grounded firmly in the journey of Mary and Joseph, and the other foot tentatively settling on the notion, that the birth of a baby boy in humble circumstances on a dark night in the middle of nowhere, has the ability to once again, capture our aching hearts and...

- inspire vision on smudged lenses,
- offer hope in new possibilities,
- deep breaths of quiet joy,
- imagination,
- courage to step out, and begin again.

So let us begin at the table; a table that gave Christ courage in His darkest hour; a table that welcomes the weak and the strong, the wise and the foolish, the saint and the sinner, the humble and the proud. Let us once again, begin the journey to Bethlehem.

Unlock your heart if it is dry or sad.
Detach from that which is over and past.

Release your spirit to Bethlehem, once again.
For God is doing a new thing.
Amen.

~This Advent series is based on the book "Celebrating Abundance" by Walter Bruggemann, a series being followed by Bible Study groups in the PCC all across Canada. Copies of the book are available at the Church Office for purchase.