

A photograph of three lit red candles with warm bokeh lights in the background. The candles are lit, and their flames are visible. The background is dark with many out-of-focus, glowing yellow and orange circles, creating a bokeh effect. The overall mood is warm and festive.

# A Different Kind of Advent:

RENEWAL & RESTORATION: ADVENT 4

## ***Fourth Sunday of Advent***

*We light all four candles today to symbolize our intense anticipation for the celebration of the birth of Jesus, the light of the world who comes to banish the darkness with love.*

**SEE+** This week we stand in great anticipation in the face of the mystery of God's love and life coming to us in the birth of the child Jesus. Yet that is what we celebrate this and every Advent and Christmas season. God's love comes to us in a vulnerable new-born child. Confounding though it is, if we can comprehend how God is active and present here, the hope is that we can begin to see all the other ways God's love continues to embrace us and our world, reaching out to us in love, calling us into relationship.

One of the parts of speech we use when we encounter mystery or have a hard time expressing how we feel in precise words is a **paradox**. A paradox is defined as a

“seeming contradiction” – something that seems to be in contradiction but really is not. For example, we sometimes say, “I’m so happy I could cry.” Technically, we associate tears with sadness, yet this phrase seems contradictory. However, we know that there are human experiences where tears can be associated with overflowing joy – the birth of a child or the release of someone we love from prison.

Paradoxes are essential when we commemorate the birth of Jesus. Why would we celebrate an all-powerful God that would choose to be present in a vulnerable child? There seem to be so many other ways God could reach out to us. This is precisely where the paradox comes in. To comprehend God’s love in the child Jesus, we begin to see how God’s love works in our world. And there are multiple paradoxes in the Christmas story – Jesus’ birth in a stable, not even a house; the announcement of his birth given to poor shepherds, not the king or ruler; the violence, danger, and trauma inflicted by the powerful threatened by the news of this child’s birth. If we see God present in a helpless child, can we see God present in all helpless children? If we follow this vulnerable child as he

grows and develops and lives his life completely in tune with that love of God that is poured into his heart, we see that Jesus too demonstrates the paradoxical quality of the mystery of God's love. Jesus eats with the rejected, cares for the poor, brings healing to the broken, and reaches out to the despised, vulnerable, and overlooked. God's love is radically humble – a mystery only captured faintly by paradox.

Our readings today speak about God making space, a home, a foundation in our lives. The scriptures attest that God has already done this at the moment of our creation and birth, and again in the generous gift of Jesus' spirit at our baptisms. All we are called to do is open our hearts to that transformative love and live it as our sure foundation. Paradoxical – definitely. But scripture tells us again and again that there is really nothing that can separate us from the love of God that has come to us in Christ Jesus! Nothing and no one. This Christmas calls us to build our house on that sure foundation and share that love with others, especially those most in need.

**DISCERN+** (We reflect on the readings for this Fourth Sunday of Advent and the testifying of others involved in restorative justice ministry as a way to listen to their challenge and discern ways they impact our lives and ministries. What are the ways the Scriptures and others' experiences, words, and stories help us understand how God is inviting us to open our lives to the love of God in Christ Jesus.]

***Readings for the Fourth Sunday of Advent:***

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/122020.cfm>

**First Reading:** 2 Samuel 7:1-5; 8-12; 14 & 16: *"The Lord will establish a house for you."*

**Second Reading:** Romans 16:25-27: *"...the revelation of the mystery."*

**Gospel:** Luke 1:26-38: "*The Lord is with you.*"

### **Wisdom Voices of Chaplaincy: Restorative Justice**

The *Wisdom Voices of Chaplaincy* video illustrates the mystery of God's love and ways in restoring people to their sure foundation and center.



<https://youtu.be/V08mDOcIFM>

**ACT** + (Questions for reflection in light of the scriptures and other voices.)

1. What are some ways God's paradoxical love has operated in your life this past year?
2. Where is God reaching out to you in the guise of those in need in your life?
3. How can you spread God's transformative and healing love?
4. What have you learned about God's love in your ministry?
5. How have others assisted and supported you in your discipleship?