

Emergency and rescue

By [Emory Gillespie](#)

November 26, 2012

For more commentary on this week's readings, see the [Reflections on the Lectionary](#) page, which includes Gillespie's current Living by the Word column as well as past magazine and blog content. For full-text access to all articles, [subscribe](#) to the Century.

My grandfather was at his 60th class reunion. During a round of golf with three classmates, one of his friends teed off. After hitting the ball, with his club still in the air, the man said, "Gentlemen, you'll have to excuse me." Then he fell to the ground, dead.

My grandfather recounted this, adding, "And it was a nice shot."

Advent's scripture passages are about genuine rescue. But I wonder whether we're sometimes embarrassed to preach about genuine rescue because we are embarrassed to admit we're having a genuine emergency.

Christmas, in all of its silverware and handbell mannerliness, is approaching. Sometimes I work deep into the night, trying to take the brutal news of our world—sickness, death, tyranny—and refine it for the occasion: "Excuse me, but our world seems to be having an authentic emergency."

Yet there will be people in the pews who do not feel at home amid the politely wrapped presents. Even if her face is arranged appropriately, even if his tie has a tasteful design of holly sprigs on it, they are hoping against all odds that you will preach a flamer, a fireball that will shine some light in their hidden spiritual caves of bone chips and dried-up dung.

So don't hold back. Raise that first candle of Advent high, and cry out, "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars." Someone in the back who is secretly having a full-scale emergency will be nodding in recognition. Proclaim it to the church, the community and the world" "Your redemption is drawing near."