



December 23, 2007

Preaching: Rev. Ronni Verboom

Matthew 1:18-25

“Making Room for Jesus”

Every year as we remember the birth of Jesus Christ we give the old innkeeper a rough time. How, we wonder, could he have turned an obviously pregnant woman away from his inn? There HAD to have been a room, a corner, a spot somewhere for this young couple! How could anyone be so heartless? But, perhaps, at other moments we wonder, what would we have done? What would we do now, if God were to come again in the flesh of a newborn baby?

Say a young couple stops at your house- on Christmas Eve! You are celebrating in an intimate gathering of family and friends. You have cherished traditions that happen every year—and they include specific people and activities: eggnog drinking, singing, gifts exchanged in ritual ways. And here is a knock at the door! A young couple, not very well-off by their appearance, the girl obviously VERY pregnant, are on their way to his folks’ place up in northern Wisconsin. It’s bad weather out—one of those situations they call a “wintry mix”. Their car has broken down and they’ve only got six bucks between them. Could they stay the night and could anyone help them with their car tomorrow, once the weather clears? What would you do? How would you feel? How would you respond to them?

We might many of us help. But we’d possibly be disappointed our Christmas traditions are being disrupted. We might be cautious and wary, wondering if this is a scam- if we are being manipulated in some way. We might DO all the right things, but FEEL less than charitable towards the young couple.

Our Scripture makes it clear that it wasn’t just the innkeeper who was faced with a difficult decision. When Christ came into this world, various people had to make room for him. And making room for Jesus wasn’t such an easy task.

Mary had to make room, not only in her heart, but in her body- for Jesus to grow and be nourished and brought to birth.

Joseph had to make room for Jesus in his life by taking a great leap of faith. On the basis of a DREAM he was to accept that God was working something miraculous in what appeared to be a SCANDAL. He was asked to trust in God's promises even though his community would believe he was marrying a woman pregnant with another man's child. Joseph made room for Jesus by accepting whatever personal embarrassment might result from his obedience to God.

The innkeeper, although he did not make room for Jesus in his inn, may have been the one to offer the stable. If not, we remember the stable was found—and the ANIMALS made room for Jesus- even letting him use the part of the stable that was surely their favorite: the feed trough!

The shepherds had to make room Jesus. They were innocently doing their job out in the fields, watching over the sheep. The peaceful evening was interrupted by an angelic visit. WE think that sounds marvelous. THEY were terrified. Once they got past that experience, they had to suspend their disbelief in order to travel all the way into town to check out the message they'd received. And later, like Joseph, they had to risk public scoffing when they told what they had seen and heard.

The Magi were not exempt from extraordinary demands that led to their encounter with Jesus. They made room for Christ by engaging in years of study. They devoted time, energy and brain power to learning about the special star they had discovered. They then invested money, effort and long months of travel to following that star. Journeys could be dangerous, there were marauding bandits and homicidal kings, like Herod.

It's not easy to make room for Jesus. There's a famous painting based on Revelation 3:20: I am standing at the door knocking. *If one of you hears me calling and opens the door, I will come in and share a meal, seated by your side.* The picture shows Jesus standing by the door of a cottage with his hand lifted to knock on it. Careful study shows something interesting: there is no latch on the outside of the door. The person on the inside CONTROLS who will enter and who will not. That is God's way. God never forces his way into our lives; Christ only enters our hearts when invited. There was no force displayed in Bethlehem. God came to the world as a little newborn baby crying in the night--- inconspicuous, unsuspected. And room has to be made for him- even though it's not always easy to do--- WE have the choice.

We've seen that making room for Jesus isn't always easy. But how might that be true for us today? The Scripture events of Christmas show us there can be tough things to do and accept in order to make room.

Rev. John Killinger suggests one thing that can be hard for us to handle: making room for Jesus means letting in more than just one little baby. When Jesus knocks at the door of our hearts, at the door of our lives—and we take the risk and open the door, Jesus comes in, yes- but he brings extra folks along.

Think about that out-of-the-way stable where he was born. Seems like it should have been a quiet place. But before long it was crowded with the shepherds—and perhaps later, people the shepherds spoke to- and perhaps folks continued to bring their animals in, as they arrived at the inn- kind of like a motel parking lot.

Killinger compares this to what happens when royalty travel. They never travel alone, but bring their retinue with them. Jesus is the King of all kings—of all queens, sovereigns, and heads of state. And Jesus brings an unusual retinue with him. Killinger suggests that Jesus' retinue is more like the followers of Andrew Jackson, the seventh President of the United States. History reports that when Jackson was sworn in as President, folks he knew from Tennessee and all the old soldiers who had fought with him at New Orleans came to Washington and descended on the White House. They devoured the food, tracked into all the rooms, swung on the drapes, spat tobacco juice on the carpets and generally ruined the furniture.

In Rev. Killinger's words: *I must warn you that it is the experience of those who open their hearts to Christ that he almost never comes alone into a life. There are dozens, perhaps hundreds of poor, infirm, illiterate souls that accompany him. All those starving children in Ethiopia and the Sudan, the disease-ridden tribespeople of the southwest United States, the crowds of Hindus in India, and the snobbish intellectuals in the universities. Do we have room in our hearts for them as well? And schoolchildren on drugs, and dirty old men and women on the streets? He will bring them, I promise you. He always does. It is his way. His "little ones", he calls them. And he says that whatever we do for them is done for him. "Inasmuch as you have done it for the least of these....you have done it for me."*

As Killinger says, "It's enough to make you want to keep the door shut, isn't it? Making room for Jesus isn't easy. I would be so bold as to say, "If it's easy, then you haven't made too much room yet—you haven't let him in very far." God's word tells us opening the door to Christ will NOT be easy. It will require strength, energy, courage, risk, trust and faith. It's not easy, but it is WORTH it. Not easy. WORTH IT. In opening the door to Christ, making room for him AND his "little

ones”, our lives are renewed and changed. Our loneliness and despair are lifted; our wounds are healed; our sins are forgiven; we are saved.

Wow. It’s kind of scary isn’t it? Christmas is almost here. Christ is knocking. Will you open the door? Will you make room this year for Jesus? The Holy Spirit is whispering, “Go on! You can do it! Open the door!”

Let us pray:

O Lord, who is content in the smallest hovel where you are truly welcome, help us to throw wide the doors of our hearts and bid you to come in this Christmas- with all your little ones, who would also have a place in our lives. For your blessed name’s sake we pray, Amen.

(Issue a challenge: Do one (more) thing for Jesus’ “little ones” before you return on Christmas Eve. Point out the opportunities to reach out to Lazarus House on Christmas Day-- printed in the announcements.)