

No Room in the Inn!

Luke 2:1-20

"And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."

What a parable of our souls, our lives and the state of our world!

There was no room in the inn!

But there was room in a manger!

Jesus and his parents, Joseph and Mary, are not the only ones to live in a time in which there was no room in the inn

We too live in a time in which there is no room in the inn.

The great spiritual writer, and monk, Thomas Merton, put it well:

“Humanity is numbered in billions!

Humanity is massed together, marshaled, numbered, marched here and there!

Humanity is taxed, drilled, worked to distraction, dazed by information, drugged by entertainment!

Obsessed by lack of time and lack of space!

Subjected to wars and rumors of war!

Of flaming cities’ and smoking lands laid waste.

The restlessness of turbulent mobs, and every day’s disaster beyond compare.”

Merton wrote those words over 50 years ago!

A prophet indeed—Merton had a capacity to discern the signs of an age that would stretch far beyond the scope of his own lifetime.

"And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."

We live in a time in which there is no room for nature!

Our global population—our ever expanding cities— leave no room for the life of nature!

Our hunger and thirst for every possible resource is leaving no room on the planet for glaciers, many animal species, clean water, coastal cities, original forests.

Nature is being pushed off!—Crowded off!—Shoved off—the Planet!

There is no room in the inn!

We live in the time in which there is no room within the human being for the human being's spiritual life.

“Men and women find no room for themselves within themselves”, is the way Merton put it.

I think what Merton meant by that is:

We are nearly unable to find rest within our own hearts.

Our busyness!—

Our obsessions!—

With lack of time and lack of space!

Our attention!—Drawn—Forced—**away from** the inner, non-material spiritual realm—**toward** the physical, material world without, with all its glittering attractions and seductions—leave us with little or no room within ourselves for ourselves.

We live in a time in which there is no room in the inn for quiet.

Neither outer quiet! Nor inner quiet!

We hunger for these states of mind and yet seem to have forgotten how to find or create outer and inner quiet!

There is no room in the inn for silence, which is why we long to experience the feeling that is produced in singing carols like “Silent Night” and “Away in a Manger”.

In the crowded inn, there is no room for solitude.

There is no room for deep thought!

There is no space within....to pay attention to the world within!

This is the reason our capacity for God is diminished.

This, I believe, is a powerful reason why we are drawn to the dimly lit manger in Bethlehem—**because** while there is no room in the inn for quiet and solitude, **there is room in the manger**.

Composers, writers and artists have caught the essential truth of the first Christmas.

In "O Little Town of Bethlehem" by Phillips Brooks!

In "There Fared a Mother Driven Forth" by G.K. Chesterton.

In "What Child is This?" (Greensleeves) by William C. Dix.....

The story of Jesus' birth teaches the timeless truth that even though the doors to one of life's bright, shining inns be closed to us, that closed door need not have the last word.

The door to one of life's mangers may be opened.

The Christ child was barred from the comfort of the inn!

But he found a place in the manger, and from that manger he became the Redeemer of millions of lives.

There were no beds left in the inn, but from the floor of cold, damp straw, Christ arose to draw the ages to his teachings and his ideas and inspire whole peoples by his compassion and wisdom.

Upon reflection, we may see embodied in this scripture a principle which operates at every level of life.

Certainly the rejection that Joseph and Mary suffered at the door to the inn was hurtful.

It must have been painful to be pushed away from the inn and have to turn toward the crude stall of a manger.

It was not the kind of place Mary would have wanted to have a baby. It would not have taken much for either to die in such unhealthy conditions.

Even so, it was the manger, not that innkeeper, that had the last word! In other sections of the Bible, we see that life's closed inns did not necessarily have the last word:

Due to his brothers' treachery, the door to happiness and security was shut to Joseph, the son of Jacob. But Joseph did not let his brothers have the last word, and later, the door to one of the highest positions in Pharaoh's Egypt was opened to him.

Ahab and Jezebel tried to shut the door on Elijah the prophet! They ran him out of the royal palace into a mountain cave. And yet in that cave Elijah had the last word!

So in countless personal biographies, life's closed inns have not had the last word!

Marian Anderson was not allowed to sing at Carnegie Hall, but in front of the Lincoln Memorial her voice rang out with such beauty and power that it was said there wasn't opera house in the world with a roof high enough to do justice to her contralto voice.

Whistler was kicked out of the West Point Academy. He was humiliated, beaten and ashamed, but he didn't let that closed door have the last word. He became one of the world's renowned artists, especially known for his painting "Whistler's Mother".

Oprah Winfrey grew up in rural Mississippi and inner city Milwaukee. She lived in extreme poverty and often had to dress in potato sacks for which she was mocked at school. She was sexually abused at an early age. Yet she has become one of the world's greatest figures in show business, the arts and philanthropy.

So this principle has held true in many personal lives.

Someone here has suffered rejection and disappointment.

There is disappointed love.

Here rejection from a job.

There is one whom a family member or friend has turned their back on.

For some it may be rejection from the world of good physical health that is especially hard to bear; or secure, happy family life.

And yet a Christmas faith affirms that closed doors such as these need not have the final word in your life

A Christmas faith affirms that if you, like Joseph and Mary, will let go and let God lift you beyond the closed door, there is a manger waiting for you!

There in the manger is waiting a new, brighter perspective on the challenges of your daily life.

There in the manger is a new shape to your family life!

There in that manger is a renewed faith and personal relationship with your God.

Friends, the insight of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the truth of the Christmas story is that even when there is no room in one of life's inns, God has a manger for you; and the door to that manger leads out into a brand new day and a brand new experience of living for you.

The repeated sounding joy of the Christmas story is that no innkeeper can prevent Jesus Christ from making room for himself in our lives and in our world.

Yes, the door to the inn may be locked!

The light in the manger may be dim!

The floor may be covered with cold, wet straw!

Oxen and sheep and other animals may be your only company!

But our God is able to do something totally unexpected in just such a place!

Our God has a history of breaking into people's lives and picking them up when they have landed on one of life's hard places!

If someone has come into this sanctuary today feeling that one of life's inns has been permanently closed to you and that the door will never, ever open again—

I urge you to make permanent room in your soul for the story of Christ's birth in the manger that first Christmas

There is a Power greater than yourself to whom to turn!

You have a Strong Redeemer who has laid his head in the same places where your soul has tossed and turned!

You have a Decisive Deliverer who will help you take life's hard things and turn them into power!

You have a Lord who will help you take life's closed inns and transform them into broadening vistas of new hope and widening horizons of renewed life!

Conclusion: The gospel author Luke once wrote:

"And when the time came for Mary to deliver, she gave birth to her first-born son and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."

That is the eternal story of Christmas!

It's the unconquerable faith of Christmas Eve!

Is it any wonder that all the world over faithful men and women and boys and girls
continue to gather to sing:

"What child is this, who, laid to rest, On Mary's lap is sleeping? Whom angels greet
with anthems sweet,- While shepherds watch are keeping? This, this is Christ the King!
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing; Haste! Haste! To bring him laud, The babe, the
son of Mary!

Merry Christmas to all.

Amen.

Rev. Scott Myers
Westport Presbyterian Church
Dec. 22, 2019

As an illustration of what I am driving at, consider this modern scene:

In the midst of a cold, snowy winter evening—a man visiting the family farm—left the farmhouse and ventured out to the cattle shed to feed the cattle.

It became a spiritual experience,” he later said, one I’ll always remember.”

I was in there with the cattle, and except for the sound of the huge, burly animals rustling around in the barn, it was quiet:

It was just ,me

And the cattle!

And the straw!

And the cold night air!

And the steam rising up off the cattle’s warm bodies!

And I felt as if he had been transported into another realm!

I realized that in some small way, this was what it must have been like to be present in the Bethlehem manger.

"And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."

We live in the time in which there is no room within the human being for the human being’s spiritual life.

“Man finds no room for himself within himself.”, is the way Merton put it!

Woman finds no room for herself within herself!

I think what Merton meant by that is:

We are nearly unable to find rest within our own hearts.

Our busyness!—

Our obsessions!—

With lack of time and lack of space!

Our attention!—Drawn—Forced—**away from** the inner, non-material spiritual realm—**toward** the physical, material world without, with all its glittering attractions and seductions—leave us with little or no room within ourselves for ourselves.

To live in the time of no room, is to come to grips with the central truth of the Nativity Story, which is:

In the inn, there is no room for Christ!

In the inn, there is no room for peace to be born— no room for love to be born—no room for goodness to survive its infancy!

And yet, without being invited, and barely managing to slip into the world through the rough hewn door of a manger—**Christ still came!**

And in the end, this is what Christmas is all about!

Christmas is about the Incarnation!

Christmas is about God making room for God in an inhospitable world!

Christmas is about Christ being born within us.

Christmas is about Christ growing within us and spreading amongst us.

It's about Decisive and Liberating Good gaining a foothold in what C.S. Lewis called "Enemy Occupied Territory"—that is—this world, this life, where all that is not-God and not-Good and no-hope seems to hold sway.

And the amazing thing is—it happened!

The amazing thing is that the Nativity Story IS true!

"And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."

Amen.

December 22, 2019

Reverend Scott Myers, Westport Presbyterian Church

if there were words to describe that experience, they were “Humble” and “Quiet”.

Christmas Eve is holier than all other nights, because we travel, in our minds and our emotions to a distant place, a holy place, a place set apart— a quiet and humble place called a manger,

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door need not have the last word. The door to one of life's mangers may be opened. The Christ child was barred from the comfort of the inn! But he found a place in the manger, and from that manger he became the Savior of millions. There were no beds left in the inn, but from the floor of cold, damp straw, Christ arose to draw the ages to his teachings and inspire whole peoples by his mercy and love!

Upon reflection, we may see embodied in this scripture a principle which operates at every level of life. Certainly the rejection that Joseph and Mary suffered at the door to the inn was hurtful. It must have been painful to be pushed away from the inn and have to turn toward the crude stall of a manger. It was not the kind of place Mary would have wanted to have a baby. Or anyone else for that matter.

Even so, it was the manger, not that innkeeper, that had the last word! In other sections of the Bible, we see that life's closed inns did not necessarily have the last word:

- Due to his brothers' treachery, the door to happiness and security was shut to Joseph, the son of Jacob. But Joseph did not let his brothers have the last word, and later, the door to one of the highest positions in Pharaoh's Egypt was opened to him.
- Ahab and Jezebel tried to shut the door on Elijah the prophet! They ran him out of the royal palace into a mountain cave. And yet in that cave Elijah had the last word!
- So in countless personal biographies, life's closed inns have not had the last word! Marian Anderson was not allowed to sing at Carnegie Hall, but in front of the Lincoln Memorial her voice rang out with such beauty and power that it was said there wasn't opera house in the world with a roof high enough to do justice to her contralto voice.
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So this principle has held true in many personal lives.

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- + There is disappointed love.
- + Here rejection from a job.
- + There is one whom a loved one has turned their back on. For some it may be rejection from the world of good physical health that is especially hard to bear; or secure, happy family life.

And yet a Christmas Eve faith affirms that closed doors such as these need not have the final word in your life! A Christmas Eve faith affirms that if you, like Joseph and Mary, will let go and let God lift you beyond the closed door, there is a manger waiting for you! There in the manger is waiting a new, brighter perspective on the challenges of your daily life. There in the manger is a new shape to your family life! There in that manger is a renewed faith and personal relationship with your God.

Friends, the insight of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the truth of the Christmas story is that even when there is no room in one of life's inns, God has a manger for you; and the door to that manger leads out into a brand new day and a brand new experience of living for you. The repeated sounding joy of the Christmas story is that no innkeeper can prevent Jesus Christ from making room for himself in our lives and in our world. Yes, the door to the inn may be locked! The light in the manger may be dim! The floor may be covered with cold, wet straw! Oxen and sheep and other animals may be your only company! But our God is able to do something totally unexpected in just such a place! Our God has a history of breaking into people's lives and picking them up when they have landed on one of life's hard places!

Never forget that after Joseph's brothers had thrown him in a pit; taken his coat of many colors and dipped it in blood so his father would think he was dead; then sold him into slavery in Egypt--after all that--the scriptures conclude: "And the Lord was with Joseph and Egypt."

Never forget that after another Joseph and his wife Mary were turned away from the inn; and then after the baby was born, they received warning of King Herod's plan to have all the children in Israel under two years of age killed, that this Joseph and Mary and Jesus went to the same place and "The Lord was with

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Jesus in Egypt".

If someone has come into this sanctuary tonight feeling that one of life's inns has been permanently closed to you and that the door will never, ever open again, I urge you to make permanent room in your soul for the story of Christ's birth in the manger that first Christmas Eve.

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"And when the time came for Mary to deliver, she gave birth to her first-born son and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn." That is the eternal story of Christmas! It's the unconquerable faith of Christmas Eve! Is it any wonder that all the world over faithful men and women and boys and girls> continue to gather on this cold December tonight to sing:

"What child is this, who, laid to rest, On Mary's lap is sleeping? Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,- While shepherds watch are keeping? This, this is Christ the King! Whom shepherds guard and angels sing; Haste! Haste! To bring him laud, The babe, the son of Mary! Merry Christmas to all. Amen.