

December 24, 2023

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Luke 2:1-20

How Does a Weary World Rejoice? We Make Room.

A reading from the Gospel of Luke 2:1-20

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. Joseph went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no place in the guest room.

Now in that same region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them, and Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told them. **This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.**

Last weekend at the youth Christmas party, Rebecca shared a quiz with the youth – testing their Christmas IQ. The second question on the quiz stumped many of us: What does the Bible say that the innkeeper said to Mary and Joseph in Luke chapter 2?

- a) "There is no room in the inn."
- b) "I have a stable you can use."
- c) "Come back later and I should have some vacancies."
- d) Both "There is no room in the inn." And "I have a stable you can use."
- e) None of the above.

And the answer is ... survey says: e) None of the above.

If you were paying close attention to my reading of our scripture this evening, you may have caught that I didn't mention the word "inn" let alone words from the innkeeper.

Joseph went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no place in the guest room.

A guest room...where did the inn go? After all one of the greatest theological questions of all time is "Do innkeepers' wives have naturally curly hair?", voiced by Frieda as she receives a nativity pageant script from Lucy in Charles' Schultz' *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. And when Frieda complains that the dust from her innkeeper husband PigPen is taking the curl out her naturally curly hair, Charlie Brown tells her "Don't think of it as dust. Think of it as maybe the soil of some great past civilization. Maybe the soil of ancient Babylon. It staggers the imagination. He (PigPen) may be carrying soil that was trod upon by Solomon. Or even Nebuchadnezzar."¹

So why the change from inn to guest room...For many years, PCO and Presbyterian churches in general have used the New Revised Standard version of the Bible or NRSV. The NRSV came out in 1989, as a "new" version of the Revised Standard. The NRSV was updated in 2022 to the NRSVUE or Updated Edition². Not the catchiest of names, but I suppose the "new, new revised standard" was awkward. And Windows 10.0 was already taken. One of the changes in the updated version was in our scripture this evening, Luke 2:7. As Religious Studies Professor Dr. Christina Bucher notes, "The NRSVUE revises this [passage] to read that "there was no place in the guest room," because the Greek in this context likely refers to a guest room in the home of friends or family, not to an "inn."³

Joseph's ancestors came from the town of Bethlehem and he certainly would have had family in the area who would have invited them to stay – if they had room. If they hadn't already filled the beds with other extended family members who were filling the town for the census. So not only does the innkeeper not utter any words, there was likely not even an inn.

But the bigger question for us this evening is what it means to make room. During our Advent season we here at PCO, have been contemplating how we rejoice in a world that is weary, in a world that is weighed down by warfare and violence, political polarization, the effects of climate change, and individual lives where too often the realities of grief, illness, loneliness, and stress leave us worn. This Advent season we have acknowledged our weariness, we have made connections, we have been amazed and tonight we make room.

¹ https://www.springfieldspringfield.co.uk/movie_script.php?movie=a-charlie-brown-christmas

² You can learn more at <https://guides.library.yale.edu/newtestament/nrsvue>
<https://www.christiancentury.org/article/interview/even-better-bible>

³ Christina Bucher. Making a Good Translation Better. *Church of the Brethren Newsletter*. June 27, 2023. <https://www.brethren.org/messenger/bible-study/making-a-good-translation-better>

We make room in our church for all of the people, who like Mary and Joseph, are on the road somewhere. Somewhere between the fear of what lies ahead and the warmth of family love. Somewhere between the realization that the definition of who is family has changed, and the realization that love is love is love. We make room for the shepherds, who were often overlooked or looked down on, kept on the outskirts of polite society because they didn't look and sound and smell like the kind of folks you want at your dinner table. We make room for angels, angels who bring messages we don't always want to hear, but messages that we need to hear. Messages to the young, and to those who are older, that they are blessed and called by God and have gifts to be shared. Messages to those who have doubts about God's place in the miraculous and the mundane. We make room for the angels who say, "Do not fear" to those who feel alone and that no one will understand what they are going through. God chose to dwell with us – in human form as Jesus Christ. Jesus knew the sting of rejection, knew the isolation that came from separation from family and friends, knew the grief and pain of losing a loved one.

This morning in our early service, we enacted our Christmas scripture and we made room on the chancel for young and old and everyone in between to know that they are welcome. We overflowed and it was full of joy. Because there is room. There is room for everyone. Jesus made room for those who fished and those who collected taxes; for those who extended abundant hospitality from their wealth and those who gave abundantly from their meager resources. Jesus made room for those sure of what they know, as well as those who muddled along, asking question after question, never quite sure they understood. Jesus is our model, so we make room. We make room because people matter. We all matter. Especially in a world that is weary ... weary of division, weary from isolation, weary from illness and grieving, weary from it all, we celebrate the hope and joy of room for all.

We come together on this night, we make room on this night, because we want – we need - to be reminded that love abounds; that we are connected to Immanuel, God with us. And that through God, we are connected to each other.

We come together on this night, because we want to make room for Christ. To make room for the hope and peace and joy and love that Christ brings into our lives, into the lives of family, friends, strangers, and yes, even those we don't much care for.

We come together on this night, because we want to make room for Christ, the one who we call the Prince of Peace, the one who when Mary heard the news that she was to be the mother of the Christ child sang of his mercy, that he would lift up the lowly and fill the hungry with good things. To make room for a just world.

We come together on this night, because we want to make room for Christ, who came into the world in a place where others said there is no room. I want to share some words from

Catholic Worker co-founder Dorothy Day. Day worked through much of the 20th century on behalf of the poor and those with housing insecurity. In 1945, at the close of WWII, Day shared these thoughts about making room for Christ:

“It is no use saying that we are born two thousand years too late to give room to Christ. Nor will those who live at the end of the world have been born too late. Christ is always with us, always asking for room in our hearts.

But now it is with the voice of our contemporaries that He speaks, with the eyes of store clerks, factory workers, and children that he gazes; with the hands of office workers, slum dwellers, and suburban housewives that He gives. It is with the feet of soldiers and tramps that He walks, and with the heart of anyone in need that He longs for shelter. And giving shelter or food to anyone who asks for it, or needs it, is giving it to Christ....

It would be foolish to pretend that it is always easy to remember this. If everyone were holy and handsome ... it would be easy to see Christ in everyone. If Mary had appeared in Bethlehem clothed, as St. John says, with the sun, a crown of twelve stars on her head, and the moon under her feet, then people would have fought to make room for her. But that was not God’s way for her, nor is it Christ’s way for Himself.

In Christ’s human life, there were always a few who made up for the neglect of the crowd. The shepherds did it; their hurrying to the crib atoned for the people who would flee from Christ. The wise men did it; their journey across the world made up for those who refused to stir one hand’s breadth from the routine of their lives to go to Christ. ...

We can do it too, exactly as they did. We are not born too late. We do it by seeing Christ and serving Christ in friends and strangers, in everyone we come in contact with. ... All our life is bound up with other people; for almost all of us happiness and unhappiness are conditioned by our relationship with other people.”⁴

What prescient words written 80 years ago. We are not too late to make room for Christ. In a weary world, we light candles of hope – of hope for a day when all will feast at a table of abundance; we light candles of peace – of peace for a day when they shall know war no more; we light candles of joy – of joy for a community where laughter and wiggles and giggles in the youngest and the oldest are celebrated; we light candles of love – of love where all are not just invited, but are welcomed with open arms. We light the Christ candle as a reminder it is never too late to make room for Christ in our hearts and in our lives. Because in the thrill of hope, a weary world rejoices. For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn as we celebrate the night when Christ was born. Amen.

⁴ Dorothy Day. We Are Not Too Late to Give Room to Christ. *Catholic Worker*. December 25, 1945. <https://catholicworker.org/we-are-not-too-late-to-give-room-to-christ/>; See also Richard Rohr in a Center for Action and Contemplation Devotional on December 22, 2023 <https://cac.org/daily-meditations/room-for-christ/#>