

"Making Room"

Luke 2:6-19 & Zephaniah 3:6-19

The anticipation was almost too much to bear; for many, many, many months the possibilities of what was about to take place had been before us. And soon, things would be set in motion and we would get to meet our precious little wonder. The years of hoping, the years of trying, the years of yearning, the times of deep disappointment, the waiting, none of it seemed to get in the way now. Suddenly it all made sense: this was it! I remember trying to anticipate just how radically my life would change forever – sure everybody had some sort of comment about this; but what did I believe? What was I prepared to receive?

This is some of what went on for Pat and me as we were expecting the arrival of our daughter, Mika. The preparations for a new family member – a child, a pet, another family member moving in to be a part of the household – such transitions are fraught with so many possibilities, so many different emotions, so much joy and challenge. It's not just getting the nursery together, purchasing a crib and baby tub and onesies, and diapers and wipes; it's not only the blankets and the bottles. Somehow, without knowing all of what we were entering into, we were preparing to make room for whatever it was that was coming...

Holidays hold some of that same energy – whether in the midst of Advent on the way to Christmas, or Hanukkah which just began, or some other festival currently underway. These are times of preparation and celebration; we are in the midst of getting ready, making room, re-arranging, modifying some of what we usually do for what we will be doing. There are different decorations, different foods, different ingredients; for some there are trees coming indoors, lights going up inside and out, ribbons and bows being tied in new places; colorful boxes and bags, and unusual stockings that are way too big for anybody's feet show up hanging in the strangest places! There are surprises all over the place – many planned, some not, all amazing.

For Christians, these wonders all start with what's involved in the arrival of Jesus the child in a manger, in Bethlehem. The possibilities of God coming near in the form of a tiny baby, after so many generations of hoping and praying and waiting and watching, are simply overwhelming to behold. Marcus Borg tells the story of 3-year-old girl, the firstborn of her family, who was extremely excited about the fact that her mother was pregnant and she would soon have a new brother or sister. Within a few hours of the parents bringing the new baby boy home from the hospital, the little girl made a request: she wanted to be alone with her new brother in his room with the door shut. Her insistence about being alone with the baby with the door shut made her parents a bit uneasy, but then they remembered that they had installed an intercom system in anticipation of the baby's arrival. They realized that they could let their daughter have her private baby time, and if they overheard the slightest indication that anything strange was happening, they could be in the baby's room in an instant.

So they let the little girl go into the baby's room, shut the door, and raced to the intercom listening station. They heard their daughter's footsteps moving across the baby's room, imagined her standing over the baby's crib, and then they heard her say to her three-day-old brother, "Tell me about God – I'd almost forgotten." (*The Heart of Christianity* pp.113-114) This evocative and beautiful story, underscores the suggestion many of us intuitively sense when in the presence of tiny little infants: we are very close to a being that has recently come from God. And that proximity brings us great wonder and joy!

This wonder is portrayed in our text, as Luke describes how Jesus is born into the only room that his parents could find – the big house was full, the stable would do. This news of a poor couple, receiving an infant into the world, travels out into the surrounding hills, not to the halls of the rich and powerful, but to those well-acquainted with stables and birthing: the shepherds who are almost synonymous with the city of David, the royal shepherd of history. While everybody else is swept up in the registration for the census, here we have people who are in a totally different category: they're "living the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night." They are like the migrant workers or the newly homeless family, living in their car; they move from place to place largely unnoticed by the authorities. They are, quite literally, not worth counting. (cf. R. Redman in *Feasting Yr. C*, vol 1: 118) And yet, they're the ones on this night who count the most: For just a moment, the great joy proclaimed in the announcement of the savior's birth, bursts through an opening in the heavens and comes right down to the earth, and the message is better than anything anybody could have dreamed: God's favor rests on everyone – even the nobodies are somebodies when it comes to the promise of peace with God on the basis of God's covenant love. In the first hours of life, it's the poor, outcast, marginalized, and the lowly that surround Jesus, the same ones he came to seek and to save according to Luke in a later chapter (19:15). It's the shepherds who alert Mary and Joseph to the amazing visit of the angelic host. For just a moment, the great joy proclaimed in the announcement of the savior's birth, knifes down through an opening in the heavens. How unusual – 'Our son? A Savior – the Messiah?! You know about this too?' Imagine how wide his parents' hearts -- already challenged by a spiritual conception and a pregnancy during the engagement period -- must have been stretched to make room for this baby! (F. Craddock, *Luke Interp. Series* (John Knox, 1990:35))

During this Advent, how will you make room for the changes God offers in arrival of this beautiful child? Could the joy of our anticipation and the excitement of new possibilities for our future be translated into doing whatever it takes NOW? Are we willing to nurture and feed and clothe and bathe these kin-dom hopes? It starts with you – there is no one else who can make these choices for you. It starts with the intentions of your heart and leads to action that grows out of the soul... Without these, we should expect nothing more; God is able, but chooses to move through the hearts and lives of ordinary people like you and I; ordinary folks like shepherds out doing their thing, protecting and leading sheep, observing the stars, listening to the breeze, noticing the grasses...suddenly the recipients of the divine message: 'This is it!! He's the one! Glory! Let's go and see and tell others what we know!'

What if we all made room for the following agreement to be embraced as one of our main rules for living each day of our lives?

"We are called by God to live this life with love for everyone. All that we do can be an expression of God's love. However mundane the task, perform it with a generous spirit and grateful heart. The most insignificant task performed with love is tribute to God." (C. Maricle from *The Jesus Priorities: 8 Essential Habits in The Uncluttered Heart*)

What if we believed the mystic, Julian of Norwich, when she writes?

"It is God's will that we have true delight with God in our salvation and that we be mightily comforted and strengthened. And so God wants our souls to be

occupied joyfully with God's grace. For we are God's bliss, for God delights in us without end, and so, by God's grace, will we delight in God." (J. of Norwich in *Encounter with God's Love*)

Could Advent really be about delighting in God, believing that we are God's bliss, and acting in that confidence?

What if the hopes framed on our registration forms from last week, were to become a reality? What if God chooses to have each come about as you've envisioned them? Could we make room for these results? Would we be ready and open? Would we listen more deeply for God's next possibilities? *GO OVER AND PICK UP BOOK AND PRAY...*

This is a season of making room for new arrivals, for the hope and the love and the peace we long for, for ourselves, our loved ones, our world. What will you do to make sure you're participating in the hopeful arrival of the Promised One? I close with a reminder of how we can begin, in the words of Victoria Stafford:

Our mission is to plant ourselves at the gates of hope – not the prudent gates of Optimism, which are somewhat narrower; nor the stalwart, boring gates of Common Sense; nor the strident gates of Self-Righteousness, which creak on shrill and angry hinges (people cannot hear us there; they cannot pass through); nor the cheerful, flimsy garden gate of "Everything Is Gonna Be All Right." But a different, sometimes lonely place, of truth-telling about your own soul first of all and its condition, the place of resistance and defiance, from which you see the world both as it is and as it could be, as it will be; the place from which you glimpse not only struggle but joy in the struggle. And we stand there, beckoning and calling, telling people what we're seeing, asking them what they see. (V. Stafford *Weavings* 3-4 2009:19)

May this sort of transformation be yours this Advent season – making room can make all the difference in the world. Amen.

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