

Title: You can have my room.

Texts: Matthew 11, Isaiah 35 and Luke 1

Advent 3

Rev. Sharon Smith

On Wednesday and Thursday this week, the St Catherine's Preschool offered two beautiful Christmas services to family and friends of the Preschool children. The singing was amazing, St Nicholas arrived (AKA John Luccock) and it was a special time of remembering the joy of the story that is Christmas.

We often romanticize the Christmas story of a baby born in a stable, and that's okay. But sometimes we need to put the reality back into it. To remember that no parents ever wanted their infant to be laid in a feeding trough for animals. No parents ever had dreams for their children of fleeing with them to another country in order to keep them from harm.

The story of incarnation, of God With Us, is glorious and tragic at once.

The Christmas story is a gritty one – today's texts reflect this:

- John is in jail, John the Baptist, the Preparer of the Way now sits in prison. His path brought to an abrupt and unjust end.
- This strange song Mary sings gives thanks for the God who brings down the powerful and lifts up the lowly; who fills the hungry and sends the rich away empty. That's the story Luke wants to tell: God lifts up those who need it, and brings down those who are suppressing God's dream of peace and justice.

AND

Something of Christ wells up in us, as we stumble along the way of justice and mercy that we are called to.

Think of how John in his confinement refused to stop looking, stop preparing, stop seeing.

And I think of a little boy at a pageant:

The role of innkeeper went to a young boy who had down syndrome. His lines were simply to say, "Sorry, there's no room in the inn!" He practiced and practiced these seven words over and over taking his role and his words ever so seriously. The big night came, it was a full church, the play was going smoothly thus far then it was time for Joseph with Mary in tow, to knock on the innkeeper's door and it seemed to go pretty smoothly.

The young innkeeper, opened the door as Joseph knocked and gave his seven words with gusto, then slammed the door shut as was his task.

But that was not the end of it, as Joseph and Mary walked off as the play demanded at this point, all of a sudden the door to the inn flew open, out stepped the young innkeeper, tears streaming down his eyes and he shouted at the top of his voice, as loud as he could, "Joseph, Mary and baby Jesus, come back, there is room, you can have my room!"

And I was amazed even with our limited resources here at St Catherine's – our energy, our finances, our time...

We were able to provide gifts for women in need in just 3 days.

Our hearts are full... and I wonder what it means for us to be called even deeper...

Mary's vision of the Magnificat shows us a model where the power equalizes and we are at the table together...

Making Room – Christine Pohl

If there is room in the heart, there is room in the house. *A Danish Proverb*

Hospitality is more complex than welcoming 'those' people into 'our' church; OR making 'room' at 'our' table. It is not our table, it is God's table and we come as equals

When a community stops practicing hospitality, it is usually dying. Whether that's a family, a church, a group of friends.

If there is little room for strangers there is usually little room for members.

Jean Vanier.

We can provide programs to the stranger, can we provide community to the stranger?

Hospitality is challenging...

"Community is dependent on defined boundaries and yet hospitality always presses toward an opening up." *Christine Pohl, Making Room.*

We invite someone into something. That something, a community, is a place where belonging and friendship already exist. And the act of inviting someone in, challenges the sense of established belonging.

So we are caught in a dilemma...

We gather in this place to be nourished, to be transformed, to become Christ's body – a community, AND We are also called to invite others in.

In offering hospitality we live in the tension between

- the grand vision of God where this is always an open door,
- and our human limits, and our human needs.

I love the line in Mary's reflections by Rosemary Power:

And we swore
we'd raise our child different,
with God's word in his ear,
a temple in his heart, from the start
A place apart.

For we can adopt practices that will keep our hearts and tables open...

Hearing and opening up to the scriptures... from curious receptive places, with beginners minds
With open hands

Places of honesty that ask of our communities:

What do you see and hear?

Places of grace and humility...

Where we enact mutuality and receive the contribution of all, especially those who are usually left out, those considered the least in our society. (The least are even greater than John the Baptist)

When we ponder this season of a growing child in Mary's womb, A widening light, I sense the invitation for my yes...

The deep Feminine quality of receptivity...

Mary is every man and every woman.

In Mary's humanity she says the eternal yes to God. And Let it be.

And we are offered moments this advent to utter our yes, and our let it be...

Richard Rohr, The Universal Christ

Denise Levertov poem: Annunciation

Aren't there annunciations

Of one sort or another

In most lives?

Some unwillingly

Undertake great destinies,

Enact them in sullen pride,

Uncomprehending.

More often
Those moments
When roads of light and storm
Open from darkness in a man or woman,
Are turned away from
In dread, in a wave of weakness, in despair
And with relief.
Ordinary lives continue,
God does not smite them.
But the gates close, the pathway vanishes.

Friends, let us walk on the
Highway, the Holy Way. Set apart.

Finding ways to say...
You can have my room.

Amen.