

“Expect The Unexpected: II - Wrong Place”

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December 7, 2008

Luke 2:1-7

When I began to put this sermon series together for Advent, and I was planning the worship services for each Sunday, it was then that I thought about, each week, building a nativity scene on the communion table. I thought it would be wonderful to have children and their families bring the different parts of the scene up front each week, until by Christmas it would be complete.

So, once I decided to do that, I went about trying to find a nativity set that would be appropriate. I already have two nativity sets of my own at home, but they're your standard-type home nativity scenes - the characters are probably about two inches high or so - and I knew that would be woefully inadequate for this room.

I'd also seen those gigantic nativity sets - you know, the ones that you can set out on your lawn. And, of course, that wouldn't work here, because we're strapped for space as it is, and with moving around for communion and all - well, there was literally “no room in the inn” for that kind of nativity scene.

So I did what anyone would do to find the appropriate sized nativity scene - I went to the internet, and typed in “nativity scene” and voila - up on the screen came hundreds of options for finding just the right one.

You cannot imagine the incredible variety of nativity scenes that are out there. There are big ones, small ones and medium sized ones. There are ones with light-skinned characters, others with dark skinned characters. There are some with the characters portrayed as children (the Precious Moments kind) and there are some with the characters portrayed as teddy bears, if you can believe that!

The prices ranged from about \$25 to thousands and thousands of dollars! The bottom line is that I could find just about any kind of nativity scene I wanted on that humongous list. There's just one thing I could not find - and that was an ugly, dirty nativity set. Wasn't there - anywhere!

I could not find a set that looked anything like what that stable probably looked like that first Christmas. They're all too pretty. The characters all look nice and put together - the animals nicely shorn, the hay laying just right, the roof of the stable all manicured. They're all too pretty.

It's like the designers of all the nativity sets in the world are afraid to make them look like what they probably really looked like. And why do you think that is? I think because, even today, we have trouble accepting the fact that Jesus Christ, the Savior of the World, was born in such a place - a rotten, stinking, dusty, musty place on a cold winter's night. It seems all so wrong, doesn't it - the Savior of the World born in such a place!

And yet, that's exactly where He was born. The only begotten Son of God born in a stable, laid in a manger.

And why? Because there was no place else for him - there was "no room in the inn" as the scripture says. No one had a place for his mother Mary to lay her head. No one looked upon her in her nine-month pregnant state, and said, "Even though I don't have a room, come on in anyway - we'll find something." No one! There was no room for Mary and Joseph, thus no room for Jesus - so He was born in the wrong place for a King to be born - in a stable, laid in a manger, with the animals by His side.

My friends, I want to suggest to you this morning that if we're not careful, we will do the same thing to Jesus today that those people in Bethlehem did to Him two thousand years ago - we'll shut Him out. Those people back then didn't turn them away because they didn't like them, they turned them away because they really didn't have room, and they didn't do anything to make room for them.

And that's where I think we are so like them. These days our lives are so filled - filled with things to do and places to be, and so filled with stuff, that we might find ourselves saying too, "sorry Jesus, we don't really have room for you just now."

What's your schedule like these days? Are your hours filled with too much to do and too little time in which to do it? Do you find yourself going non-stop from morning til night, and dropping into bed exhausted? Are you constantly looking at the list of the things you need to get done before Christmas?

Well, where is "making room for Jesus" on that list? Is it even on the list? That's the sad thing, friends. Sometimes we're so tied up in the whirlwind of things getting ready for Christmas, that we forget the whole reason we're celebrating Christmas in the first place. One person put it so pointedly when he wrote, "We literally run ourselves ragged in this season and in so doing we tragically miss out on much of the quiet joy God intended us to experience as we celebrate the birth of His Son. The worst consequence of this hurried way of life is that we just don't make the time to stop and think and pray and enjoy the intimate relationship with God that Christmas made possible." (on-line, Redland Baptist Church)

In essence, we shut Jesus out, we don't make room for Him - just like they did so long ago. Oh, that we would learn from our forebearers instead of repeating their mistake.

Every year about this time, I go back and read a sermon by a man named Gene Kline called "The Innkeeper" because it reminds me about the dangers of not making room for Jesus, especially during Advent. I talked about this sermon a number of years ago. It's told from the innkeeper's perspective, and it takes place 33 years after Jesus' birth. He's still running the inn, and one day a group of people come into the inn for lodging, and he hears them talking about Jesus. They've been following Him, and they're so excited. He hears them talking about His preaching and teaching, His healings and miracles.

Curious, the innkeeper goes over and engages them in conversation, asking them about this Jesus. So they tell him and they begin by telling about His birth right there in Bethlehem, in a stable among the animals. The more they tell him, the more he begins to put two and two together, and he realizes that it was his stable, and as they go on, he remembers that night. He remembers turning away a young couple, the woman very, very pregnant, the man looking worried. He remembers them.

Soon, the innkeeper begins to cry uncontrollably, startling his guests. He began to explain to them, with these words. He said, "I remember a couple coming into my inn. The reason I remember them is that they came later than all the rest - so much later. I remember them because the man's young wife was so pregnant. You could feel for his poor wife. She was due to deliver at any moment. But I had no room for them. I was sorry, but they had just come too late. I didn't have room for them. The only room I told them that they could possibly find in the whole city of Bethlehem would be among the stables. And that's where they went. That's where I sent them."

And as he said that, he thought to himself, "and now they're telling me that this same couple who stayed in my stable were God's appointed parents for His Son, and that He was born in my stables. It happened right under my nose! I know it now. Words cannot express what I feel. God was here! The Messiah was here! And I missed it! I missed it!" (on-line, Gene Kline, "The Innkeeper")

This incredible sermon finishes with the innkeeper speaking to us. "My concern for you (he says) is that in your Christmas rush, in your great feasts, in the opening of your presents - that the season does not go by, that the day does not go by and you not find room for the Messiah."

He says, don't let it happen, rather "remember. Remember, so that when you

gather on Christmas morning, you are doing so because of Jesus. As you see the joy of children opening presents, as you see the joy of family reunited, let Christ be a part of that moment. Let him into your inn because He is already there, waiting for you to find room for him in your busy lives.”

Let him into your inn! Perhaps there are no more important words you and I could hear this morning. Let him into your inn!

Jesus was born in the wrong place on that day so long ago because there was no room in the inn then, let's not have it happen again today. Let Him into your inn! Let Him into your heart! Clear out some of the other stuff, and make room for Him!

As you come forward this morning to receive communion, make room for Him. For in communion, we remember that the world that had no room for Him at His birth, had little room for His ministry and His message in His life, and the only room they offered Him in the end was a cross - yet, in spite of it all - in spite of all the wrong ways the world treated Jesus, God made a way and made it right.

Make room in your heart today and give God thanks for making a way, for sending His Son, for saving us and for setting us free. Make room for Jesus in your heart and in your life, this day and all the days to come. Amen.