

"The Inn – Housing the Holy"

December 24, 2021

The Inn: Housing the Holy series

We've been preparing to house the Holy One of God in the season of Advent - this season before Christmas. We've talked about making room, making space, sharing what we have, and seeing ourselves as a place where Love can find a home and be shared.

Tonight, it all comes together in the story we tell each year. Isaiah talks to people in a difficult time – offering hope for the One who will come and who will make a new way of justice, righteousness, and peace. Luke recounts the story of Jesus' birth – not a silent or solemn night by any means – but a real and raw story of God coming into the world as it is. God coming to a place where we wouldn't ever imagine a King to be born, and yet here we are. The place that was available for God to be born – a manger in a space where the animals lived.

Our imaginations may not be able to picture it, but my imagination goes to a barn. I know something about barns having grown up on a dairy farm. Some of you may know something about them, too. These days, barns have become popular venues for weddings and celebrations. But let's be honest, barns are not glorious places when used for their intended purpose. I can remember, and especially this time of year, barns are cold and drafty. They are not the cleanest places. They are not the safest places. They can be dark and very scary at night. Barns are not glorious – and certainly not a place fit for a King.

But here we are, facing the reality that Jesus is born into the world as it is – imperfect, in need of salvation, in need of God's help to get things right. We need God's help to get things right because things aren't right - right now. Right now, that's some consolation for me, and maybe for you, too. Maybe you're here because it's what you do on Christmas Eve, but maybe there's a part of each of us that needs to know that Jesus can still be born into the world as it is – and still do the saving work of Love and Grace that Jesus does every day.

This may seem like a strange Christmas. For some of us, it may be even more difficult to navigate where we are this year. But I wonder if it's more meaningful. Last year, there were a few of us here in the sanctuary while many joined us online. Tonight, some are here, and some are online. It's very different than it was two years ago.

We still want the comfort of this space and this time. We still want to be together and sing the songs we know and light candles because it matters to us. I'll confess that I had to read over the book and watch the video of the innkeeper a few times because I

was overwhelmed with emotion. *You never know whom God may bring your way; you always make room.* Even that line in a children's book – *and a Little One came for the world* – choked me up.

And maybe it's because we're all feeling the weight of our current reality – and the need for what we talk about through Advent – hope, peace, joy, and love – and the truth that it culminates as we celebrate Christmas – the coming of the One who brings hope, peace, joy, and love for the whole world. That's the promise that the prophets have offered in this season. It's the promise we can trust, believe in, claim, and share.

We can trust it even as we know that things are different than last year. The highs and lows we've experienced, the moments we've found ourselves welcomed, loved, and cared for by God, and those times of struggle.

How does the assurance of God's grace and presence help us to make more room – to house what it is holy, to open our hearts to the challenge of what it means to welcome Christ and welcome others in his name? *There's always room for a little one here...*

Friends, if we've one important thing in all that's happened, we need each other, and we need to be the ones to welcome one another in love. We need to care about each other and help each other.

So, my prayer is that I can welcome Jesus again – and let him help me to be more welcoming to others. Because we know the rest of the story in Luke, chapter 2. Shepherds were greeted by angels, who told them good news of great joy – for all the people. We need Good News. Our souls need it desperately. And the shepherds became the first ones to share Good News. Life was different; they were different because they made room for this holy encounter and allowed God to enter into their lives.

Tonight, we have that same opportunity – to house the Holy, to share Good News, to be changed by what we know is true – that because Jesus is born into the world just as it is, the world is changed. We are changed. May God continue to change us by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Let us pray...