

The Consequence of Overbooking

Luke 2:1-7

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(Preached during a Las Posadas service presented by the GPC children's choirs)

Many of you who have attended the Night of 1000 Candles at Brookgreen Gardens have heard Ron Daise perform "A Gullah Christmas Story." At one point in the story he tells of a time when he and his wife were traveling through parts of rural South Carolina. I believe it was during the evacuation for Hurricane Hugo. His wife was great with child, maybe 7 or 8 months pregnant. It was late in the day, and they were road weary. They needed to find a place to stay. They tried a number of places, with no luck. The problem was, all the hotels and motels were either booked or closed. The situation became even more urgent when Ron's wife started to have some abdominal discomfort, and they feared that she may have been going into labor. They did manage to find a hospital, where Mrs. Daise received care in the emergency room, and her pains stopped. In the meantime, Ron found a motel with a vacancy, and they were able to spend the night and wait out the storm.

For several hours that day, Daise and his wife almost certainly felt like Joseph and Mary did on a certain night two thousand years ago: "[Joseph] went [to Bethlehem] 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 for them in the inn."

There was no room at the inn...

The children of the church just presented an adaptation of the annual Christmas festival, Las Posadas. Las Posadas is a Mexican custom in the Roman Catholic Church. It is celebrated for nine consecutive evenings, beginning December 16. (It is called a novena, which is a Spanish word for a nine-day period of prayer and devotion.) Nine homes or families in the neighborhood are selected in advance to represent the *Posadas* or inns. Each night of the novena the families taking part form a procession and make a pilgrimage to one of the inns. They carry candles and sing hymns depicting the story of Mary and Joseph traveling to Bethlehem. Songs are sung at the door of the "inn". On each of the first eight nights the family of the "inn" sings a little song which indicates that there is no lodging for the Holy Family, and Mary and Joseph are sent away. But before they go, the whole procession, singing, passes through the rooms of the home. On the last night the procession is admitted to the house in which a Christmas crib with a manger has been set up.

What we saw the children portray a few moments ago was cute and adorable. But lost in the cuteness of their interpretation of the event is the sense of desperation that Joseph and Mary must've felt, not only when they realized that there were no rooms to be had anywhere in the town, but especially when it became clear that Mary was about to give birth.

It seems that, because of the census ordered by Caesar Augustus, Bethlehem was overbooked.

Bethlehem was overbooked, and so there was no room at the inn.

What was true for a town that was overbooked and unprepared for the arrival of the Messiah, is also true for us today. It has nothing to do with hotel rooms and occupancy rates--in that regard, our economy has ensured that there are plenty of rooms available. But isn't it the case that we live in a time when everyone is encouraged to overbook their lives? Isn't it the case that we face pressure on all sides to fill every moment of our lives with some kind of activity? Isn't it the case that virtually every other activity is filled with some sense of urgency that pushes our devotion to God off to the side? We don't mean to be that way, but isn't that the way it so often turns out?

Is it possible that today, if Joseph and Mary were to arrive on the doorstep of our lives, we would have no room for them? Are we too busy, are our lives too full for us to be able to notice the Savior coming into our world? Have we overbooked our lives, so that there is no room for our Lord to enter in?

Many years ago Robert Boyd Munger wrote what instantly became a classic devotional booklet. It's called, "My Heart, Christ's Home."ⁱⁱ It begins with a man telling of the time when he invited Christ to come and live in his heart, as if the man's heart were a house in which Jesus could dwell. And so Jesus came into this man's heart. Only, Jesus would not stay in the guest room, or even in the living room. Jesus wanted to inhabit every room in the man's heart: The library, which represented the things the man put into his mind, the books he read, the shows he watched; the game room, which represented the things the man did for recreation, including going to bars; the dining room, which represented the appetites of the man's spirit, things like money and power and status; there were other rooms, as well. The thing that every room had in common was that the man was uncomfortable having Jesus share those things with him, because he knew there were things that pushed Jesus aside or displeased Jesus.

It is a story that has too many parallels in our lives, I fear. For even when Jesus comes into our hearts, there are areas of our lives that we don't want to relinquish, there are goings-on that make us turn our backs on Jesus. We have overbooked, and much of that which we have allowed to occupy space in our hearts is not appropriate for our Lord.

If Joseph and Mary were to come to the doorstep of our lives, is it possible that they would find no room for them? Are we too busy, are our lives too full for us to be able to notice the Savior coming into our world? Have we overbooked our lives, so that there is no room for our Lord to enter in?

In "My Heart, Christ's Home," the man makes a conscious decision to clear out his heart, so that Christ may enter in and dwell throughout it. He cleans up his mind, he changes his appetites, he finds time to spend in the company of Jesus. The last room he turns over to Jesus is a dark closet in which the man has tried to hide the shameful things of his life. The man can't even go into the closet to clear it out--he simply gives Jesus permission and authority to empty it of all its foulness and clean it from floor to ceiling. Finally, after the man has given Jesus a key to every room in the house, the man hands over the title. Jesus changes from guest, to owner.

It is a beautiful picture of what every one of us needs in our own lives. The Advent longing calls out, Come, Lord Jesus! The truth is, that is the cry of every human heart. Yet there is no room at the inn.

Let every heart prepare him room.

Let every heart prepare him room.

It was the typical Christmas pageant. Miss Lumbard was trying to assign all the children to their appropriate roles. Wallace Purling wanted to be a shepherd and have a flute, but Miss Lumbard found a more

important role for Wally. He was about nine, and rather big for his age, but also a bit slow. Miss Lombard thought his size would make the lines of the innkeeper more forceful, and besides there were not too many words for Wally to remember.

So it was as that fateful night began. The usual crowd of parents and loved ones gathered for the annual program. The play started with an angel appearing to Mary, and then Mary and Joseph began their journey. Wally watched intently as Joseph and Mary made their way to Bethlehem.

Then the time came. Mary and Joseph appeared at the door of the inn. Joseph knocked on the door and Wally the Innkeeper was there waiting. "What do you want?", he said, swinging the door open.

"We seek lodging," came the reply from Joseph.

"Seek it elsewhere." Wally said looking straight ahead and speaking brusquely.

"Sir, we have asked everywhere in vain and we have traveled so far."

"There is no room in the inn for you." Wally looked properly stern.

"Please Mr. Innkeeper this is my wife she is heavy with child and needs a place to rest."

This time Wally looked at Mary. There was a long pause. People in the audience were beginning to feel an uncomfortable tension in the silence. Finally, the prompter whispered loudly from the side, "No! Be gone!"

Wally obediently repeated his words: "No! Be gone!"

Joseph placed his arm around Mary and walked sadly away. The tired little mother of Jesus laid her head on his shoulder. The innkeeper did not go back inside the inn. Wally stood there watching the forlorn couple. His mouth stood open, his brow was creased, his eyes began to fill with tears. Suddenly this Christmas pageant became different from all the others.

"Don't go Joseph," Wally called out. "Bring Mary back". Wally's expression changed into a beaming smile, "You can have my room."

Won't you resist the temptation to overbook your lives? Won't you call out to our Lord, "Come, Lord Jesus! You can have my room."

Let every heart prepare him room.

Amen.

ⁱ Luke 2:5-7, NRSV

ⁱⁱ You can find a copy of this devotional classic on our website at the following address:

<http://www.gtpres.org/My%20Heart%20Christ%27s%20home.pdf> or go to the resources page on our website: www.gtpres.org/links.cfm