

December 24, 2015

A Sermon Preached by
The Reverend Dr. W. Douglas Hood, Jr.

“When God Knocks”

Luke 2:1-7

Listen for God’s Word:

“She gave birth to her firstborn child, a son, wrapped him snugly, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the guestroom.”

Luke 2:7

In Bethlehem, there is a most remarkable guesthouse, not because of what happened there but because of what almost happened and didn’t. Through Joseph and Mary, God knocked. But because there was no room, God was turned away. God came to earth, someplace else.

Before moving to Florida, three and a half years ago, I lived in Bucks County, Pennsylvania – a place rich in history. My favorite restaurant was Piper Tavern, a favorite restaurant of Benjamin Franklin. Another restaurant and guesthouse was the William Penn Inn. George Washington both slept there and ate there. One year, I searched the internet for a charming, historic bed and breakfast for a romantic weekend with my wife. One I located proudly announced, “Over two hundred years of excellence in guest service. And to our knowledge, George



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Washington never slept here.”

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They turned God away.*

There is a guesthouse in Bethlehem that can say with certainty, “God was not born here.” They turned God away. Why was God turned away? Pay attention to the details of the story: “Because there was no place for them in the guestroom.” It is important that you not miss that; that God was turned away, “Because there was no room.” It was not because God was not welcomed. God was turned away simply because there was no room.

May I tell you tonight, lovingly and with deep conviction, Christmas Eve is all about God knocking on the door of your heart? The question is not, “Is there room?” I know people in this church who work seventy or eighty hours a week. Perhaps there is someone here tonight who works more than that. I know there are families who struggle with two careers and are

trying to raise one, or two, or three children. For some homes in this church, you are also caring for aging parents. For many of you tonight, your lives have no extra room for anything else. The question of this Bible lesson from Luke's Gospel isn't, "Is there room?" For many of you, the honest answer is, "No room."

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The question is, "Will you
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God knocks?*

But that isn't the question of this Bible lesson. The question is, "Will you make room?" Will you make room tonight for God when God knocks?

My wife Grace and I have guests in our home tonight. Our daughter, Rachael, is away this Christmas. She is a photographer with Holland America Cruise Lines and is somewhere in South America tonight. So our guests are in her room. Our house is full. There is no room left. I imagine the same is true for many of you. You have guests from out of town and your home is full.

Now imagine with me that after the Christmas Eve services are over tonight, I go home with my family. Upon pulling into my driveway I see the person I admire most in this world. He is standing at my front door and needs a room for the night. Will I answer him, "No room? That would be an honest answer. But this is someone I most admire. Friends, I will not answer, "No room." I will *make* room.

*Christmas Eve is all about
God seeking to come into our
lives, to take up residence in
our lives*

That guest house in Bethlehem probably told the truth. There was no room. That isn't the point. The point of the story is that they didn't make room. Christmas Eve is all about God seeking to come into our lives, to take up residence in our lives. I know that for many of you there is no room. That isn't the question. The question is, "When God knocks tonight, will you make room for the Lord of your life?"

**Try a Twenty Minute Plan.
Commit daily to spending
twenty minutes a day reading
the Bible and prayer. Then
resolve to obey all that you
understand from your reading.**

How do you do that? Try a Twenty Minute Plan. Commit daily to spending twenty minutes a day reading the Bible and prayer. Then resolve to obey all that you understand from your reading. You may say, "Pastor, I don't have twenty minutes." I know you don't. There is no room. That's not the question tonight. The question tonight is, "Will you take a hard look at your life and somewhere, make twenty minutes for God?"

Perhaps you have heard the story of Wally Pearling. It is a true story that has been told for several years now in many churches because of its power. Wally Pearling was nine years old. He lived not far from Atlanta, Georgia. He was handicapped, mentally. Wally was not as quick and bright as the other children. The big event in that community every year was the Christmas Pageant. And Wally was anxious to be part of the pageant. Wally wanted to be a shepherd.

There was a difficulty with this, of course. The shepherds had many speaking lines that had to be memorized. Wally was simply unable to remember so many lines. So, they made him the innkeeper. Wally would only have two words to remember, "No room."

When Joseph and Mary knocked, Wally would open the door, look at Joseph and Mary and simply say, "No

room." That moment in the pageant arrived. Joseph and Mary knocked and Wally opened the door. Looking directly at Joseph and Mary, Wally spoke his well-rehearsed line, "No room." Then something remarkable happened. No one knows for certain why it happened. It wasn't in the script. Perhaps it was because Joseph and Mary were such fine actors, dropping their heads in sadness. Perhaps it was because Wally had a really big heart. Whatever the reason, Wally never broke his gaze at Joseph and Mary. He was supposed to close the door but he didn't. Standing there on stage, Wally began to cry. And then, remarkably, Wally spoke again, "Wait, you can have my room for the baby!"

What does the Bible say? "And a little child shall lead them?" Amen.

*This is a sample meditation that is posted weekly on Dr. Hood's blog
<http://firstdelray.com.blogspot.com>
To subscribe, enter your email address on the top of the blog page.*

Christmas Necessity

*"... and on earth peace among those whom he favors."
Luke 2:14 (Common English Bible)*

Some years ago, while I was still in high school, I remember a radio station that made a courageous decision to change their programming. Rather than continuing to compete in a saturated market of pop music, this station moved in a direction never considered by their competitors – what the Harvard School of Business calls, “Blue Water Strategy.” Simply, they would play Christmas music all year long. The idea was that the spirit of Christmas should not be celebrated only once a year. Ultimately, the idea failed. Listeners dwindled, advertising revenue dropped and the station returned to pop music. But that station did make a good point: the spirit of Christmas is not simply holiday amusement; the spirit of Christmas is the basic flour out of which relationships are nourished and communities are held together.

The spirit of Christmas is a deep and persistent call to peace and good will among all people. Rather than a light-hearted indulgence, the spirit of Christ is the most valid approach for individuals – and nations – to move toward any real, long-range relationship that honors one another, protects and cares for each other. So, in these few words from Luke's Gospel, the angels announce, in hymn, this solid principal now made possible in the birth of Jesus. Increasingly, in a world filled with uncertainty and fear, the spirit of Christmas is being recognized as a strong necessity if there is to be any carefree rest for us when the darkness of evening falls. Peace instead of fear. What more glorious words could Christmas bring?

Today, if there is in our midst anyone who feels that life has little purpose, anyone who has become discouraged by difficulty or lack of opportunity, Luke's Gospel has a word for them, “Jesus is standing by.” In Jesus' birth, God demonstrates not only awareness of our plight, God expresses concern. If there is a soul that trembles with fear and dreads to take a step because the world may consume them, the angels announce that there is now cause to anticipate peace; God has drawn near to us on this day, Christmas Day. Peace and good will has been unleashed in the world. If only small glimpses are seen here and there, it is enough. This spirit of Christmas is an unstoppable force and is moving toward becoming the ruling spirit on earth.

So, what should we do? Something that is recognized in many places in the world, in many different faith traditions, is to carry some tangible symbol or memento of faith and trust – a tiny cross in the pocket, a medallion in a purse, a lapel pin on clothing, or a rosary in a briefcase. These tokens remind the individual of some spiritual value and commitment. I ask you to do something comparable. Locate your Bible and place it in a prominent location in your home or office. Be certain that it is placed in a manner that you will see it each day. Then resolve that once each day you will read a small portion of it and close with this prayer: *“Shape me, O God. Shape me, by these words, to be an instrument of your peace, in my family, in my community and where I work. Allow my life today to be a tangible symbol that your peace is advancing in this world, that because of the birth of Jesus, the world is now changing. Amen.”*

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