

The Geography of Love: The Stable
Luke 2:1-20
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First Christian Church
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Consider the stable and the manger. It's hard to believe they were God's chosen place for God to welcome the world in love. After all, the stable was nothing more than an annex to the inn where there was no room for Joseph and Mary. It was no better than a smelly place where the animals fed and slept, and, yes, as we used to say around our house when we let the dog out "to do their duty." The manger was nothing more than a feeding trough for cows and oxen and donkeys. There was nothing special about the stable and the manger.

And yet, in that glorious moment of our Lord's birth, God invited poor and rich, young and old, outcast shepherds and wealthy magi bearing expensive gifts to gather and bow before the infant king in this simplest of simple places. For centuries people like us, on balmy December nights and on nights as frozen as Arctic tundra, have gathered to worship a God Who became one of us.

But we miss the point if we believe this night is *only* about God coming as an infant in such a humble place. It is just as much about how we might become that welcome manger, that welcome stable, for a lost and lonely world. If God is truly born in us this night, we need to become that stable, that manger of welcome, love, and compassion for others. We need

to embody the compassion, the “womb-love,” God has for the world when Christ was born in Bethlehem.

A story suggests what I mean. Rosemary Kennedy was the third child of Rose Kennedy, the mother of President Kennedy and Senators Bobby and Teddy. When Rosemary was born, she was a beautiful child. Rose and husband Joseph were ecstatic. Until they learned Rosemary was retarded and nothing could be done to change that.

“Some anger grew within my heart,” Rose said. “How could God do such a thing to this child—and especially to me? I turned my back on God, my husband, my closest friends—and became a recluse. My husband and I seemed to shun the child. I was boiling over with resentment.

“There was a lovely woman who was one of our maids. She sensed my boiling soul. ‘Please excuse me, Mrs. Kennedy; but I’ve been watching you the last few weeks. I love you very much, and I hate to see this destroy your life. I say this as gently as I know how: Mrs. Kennedy, you’ll never be happy until you make your heart a manger where the Christ child may be born.’

“I fired her on the spot! You have no idea how filled with anger, how isolated, how focused on doubt I became... That night, my mind ruminated relentlessly, keeping me awake until the late hours. I could not forget that lovely face, the sweetness of her countenance, the sub-surface joy that

seemed to boil up continually in her spirit...and especially those deathless words, ‘Mrs. Kennedy, you’ll never be happy until you make your heart a manger where the Christ may be born.’”

“I have loved Christ all my life, and tried to be a good Catholic girl all my years; but this was one of those joyous moments of real *contact* with God and His Son. So I knelt beside my bed and prayed, ‘Dear God, make my heart a manger where the Christ child may be born.’ I felt a fresh new divine entry into my life, and there was born in me a passion, a love for retarded children.”¹

Though to the manor born, Rose Kennedy, with the help of God, in the form of her maid, paused at the manure-strewn stable of her own life and looked in to see the manger. What she saw was the womb-love, the compassion, of God waiting to make a manger of her heart, so God’s love could be born in her for her child, Rosemary. And, oh by the way, Rose Kennedy rehired that maid. “She was with us for years, until her death.”

Tonight we come to this “stable” to see the manger God wants to make of our hearts for others who need our womb-love. Tonight we come to this “stable” so Christ might be born in us. When this happens, after this happens, we too will be able to understand how the songwriter could say:

In this very room there’s quite enough love for one like me,
And in this very room there’s quite enjoy joy for one like me,
And there’s quite enough hope and quite enough power to chase

away any gloom,
For Jesus, Lord Jesus, is in this very room.

In this very room there's quite enough love for all the world,
And in this very room there's quite enough joy for all the world,
And there's quite enough hope and quite enough power to chase
away any gloom,
For Jesus, Lord Jesus...is in this very room.²

¹Jess Moody, *Club Sandwich* (Broadman and Holtman, 1999), pp. 31-34, as found in *PreachingToday.com*,
Keyword: Manger

²"*In This Very Room*," Words & Music by Ron Harris