**Do you have room?**

Luke 2:1-20

I feel sorry for the Innkeeper. Over the years he’s gotten bad press. It wasn’t his fault that his inn was full, but we blame him for making Mary and Joseph find shelter in a stable. It wasn’t his fault that Mary and Joseph arrived so late in the evening that there was no room for them in the inn. It wasn’t his fault that, unlike Motel 6, he couldn’t keep the light on for these two weary travelers. It wasn’t his fault. But we blame him.

I’m thankful for the Innkeeper because this simple statement about there being no room in the Inn becomes a symbol for Luke. Throughout his gospel it becomes a theme, and Luke shows us how this phrase occurs over and over throughout Jesus’ ministry.

You see, there was no room for Jesus in the economic world. Luke writes that one-day Jesus and the disciples step off a boat and a mad man runs toward them, shouting "I am legion.” Jesus commands the demons to come out of this man and into a nearby herd of pigs who, now possessed, run off a cliff and were killed. The man was healed.

You remember the story. But do you remember the response of the community. In proper Presbyterian fashion, they form a committee which goes to Jesus and kindly asks him to get out of town.

They didn’t care about the demoniac man. He’d been around for so many years that he’d simply become a part of the landscape. What really ticked them off was the fact that Jesus destroyed a herd of pigs. That was hitting them right where it hurt--in the pocket book. There was just no room for Jesus in the economic world.

And, there was no room for Jesus in the legal world. The law was cut and dried. It had been codified centuries earlier--all the way back to Moses. One of those laws said that whoever committed adultery would be stoned to death. It was one of the Ten Commandments: Thou shalt not commit adultery.

They came down harder on the enforcement of this law than any other. The penalty for adultery was death by stoning. No loopholes, no plea-bargaining, no exceptions (unless you were a man).

So when the crowd brought Jesus a woman who had clearly been caught in the act, they were not prepared for his response. He refused to join their lynch mob. Yes, he knew the law; yes he’d read the Torah. But he also knew about grace. And that was higher than the law.

The crowd, with stones in their hands, was astonished. They dropped their stones and walked away but they didn't like it. A person who has his mind changed against his will is a person whose mind hasn't changed. And they didn’t like it. Jesus had said in effect: people are more important than policy.

Oh, they didn't do anything about it right away. But as they walked away, they thought, “you wait. You’ll get yours someday. You’ll see.” There was no room for Jesus in the legal world.

There was no room for Jesus in the religious world. That sounds strange, but it’s true. People like Annas and Ciaphas already had all of the high positions. Israel had all the high priests they needed and then some. Who was this new guy who called himself teacher, rabbi. Where did he go to seminary? Who were his parents? Where does he get his authority? Just who does he think he is?

They didn't open their arms and welcome him into their clerical profession. In fact, they did everything they could to keep him out. They weren't about to adjust their comfortable life styles and position in the community because of the claims of Jesus. They organized themselves and did everything they could to keep him out. There was no room for Jesus in the world of religion.

And lastly, there was no room for Jesus in the world of politics. Oh, the people wanted him to be King. But Jesus wouldn't play by the rules. He shunned the smoke filled rooms where plans were devised and deals were made and spent his time with people who had no influence or power in the world. When he refused to accept an earthly crown of power, prestige, and position, they gave him another crown, one made of thorns. There was no room for Jesus in the world of politics.

Wherever Jesus turned there was no room for him. What began first in Bethlehem when the innkeeper turned him away became a recurring theme for Luke. That was then, and we wouldn’t do that today.

Fact is that Jesus knocks at the door of our hearts many times in life, in a variety of ways, through a variety of people, in a variety of events. And more often than not we have no room for Jesus, either.

Well, you say, I’m not a preacher, I’m not a theologian, how am I supposed to recognize these times? Truth is, we’re given no more preparation than the innkeeper. Truth is, the Messiah comes to us just as he came to the innkeeper. Not in the form of a King in robed splendor, but in the form of people in need. And how we receive Christ in the world depends in large measure on how we receive these people.

The innkeeper claimed he had no room in his inn. We claim we’re too busy to help or care or listen or comfort those who come into our lives unexpectedly. So I wonder, when we do that, if there’s enough room in my heart for Jesus. And if I’m any different than the Innkeeper.

How about you?