

SPEAKER: As she gave birth to her first born son, and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger, or a stable because there was no room for him, for them in the inn. My brothers and sisters, I would never want to be judged by a single snapshot of my life. Can you imagine such a thing?

Imagine one sinning innocuous act, solidifying your place in infamy. Well, this is the case for the innkeeper at the hotel Bethlehem. For 2,000 years, at least once per year, he or she is judged by one single moment. The moment that that innkeeper said to Mary and Joseph, "Sorry, there's no room for you."

Possibly it was true. There was no room at the inn. So this could have been any of us on that given day declaring, "I'm sorry, there's no room."

Yet something tells me, something tells me if the innkeeper knew that this woman was about to deliver the baby that had the power to deliver him, I have a feeling he would have made room that night. If the innkeeper knew it was Jesus, the promised Messiah, he most likely would have given up his own quarters to let this young peasant family have a place to stay. If he had known that the birth of this child would split history in the half, and we would thus measure the second half of time, the second millennium, next two millennia, by the name of this child that's born, I'm sure that this innkeeper would have found some place for this family to rest their head that night.

So maybe this is what the lesson might be about for us. It's about what and who you and I privilege. If we're honest with ourselves, some of us break our necks to get close to those who we consider to be somebody. We bend over backwards to curry favor with the perceived rich, powerful, those who can help us get connected. But do we think about what it might mean when God's blessing emerges from an impoverished couple from the wrong side of the tracks? What about when precious divinity presents itself in the womb of a teenage mother, impregnated under questionable circumstances.

What is divine about a peasant family who had to leave their home and trek for days because of imperial policies that were beyond their control? Well, if we're honest with ourselves and our world today, in any of these cases, it would be really easy for us to declare, "I'm sorry. There's no room for you."

If we peruse the pages of history, we have to own the fact that many of history's greatest lights have been on the receiving end of this contemptuous cry, no room. Years ago, years ago Socrates sought to give birth to new and creative ideas and conceptions of truth, justice, and eudaimonia. Yet it was the Athenians of his day that cried out to him, "We have no room for your philosophical ideas and speculations." Copernicus then came along with scientific insights concerning the universe, but it was the closed minds of the Catholic church that closed their ranks and cried out to him, "We have no room for your bogus scientific discoveries." And in recent history, there was a tenant farmer in the deep south by the name of Fannie Lou Hamer. Fannie Lou Hamer had the audacity to believe that the right to vote and political participation in

America should be granted to all people, regardless of race, gender, or socioeconomic status. And therefore in 1964, she, along with the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party took their cause of equality and fairness to the Democratic National Convention, only to hear the words "We have no room for your activism."

This is why, my brothers and sisters, we must think long and hard about what we've done to this nation, and what we've done to our world, because of our penchant to first declare, "There's no room."

The next Henry Wadsworth Longfellow may be living in an old Midwest mill town ravaged, ravaged by opioids. The lack of educational opportunities are telling him on a daily basis, "There's no room for you." The next Flannery O'Connor may reside in the swamp marshes of the Mississippi Delta, but yet economic inequality may abort this child's destiny into a nihilistic abyss before her identity has even had a chance to develop because of economic injustices, crying out, "There's no room." And maybe, just maybe the next Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Isabel Allende, stands at their parents' knee seeking asylum at the southern border today. Yet child separation policy and tear gas cans have a strange way of declaring, "There's no room for you."

This is why we must be mindful of our actions, for even the slightest act of indifference can leave a lasting impression. Willful acts of cruelty can contaminate young minds. Pernicious governmental policies can imprison multiple generations to poverty. And insecure emperors can corrupt our most noble institutions and corrode our collective morality.

The innkeeper didn't just wake up in the wrong place at the wrong time. He made choices. We make choices. And these choices decide ultimately where we end up on the historical records. Will we be one with our age and end up on the wrong side of time? Or will we stand with those who God cares about most-- the victimized and the most vulnerable-- and then pray that we end up on the right side with God for all eternity?

Suffering, misery, violence, hatred-- these are not foregone conclusions. Bombs don't just fall from the sky. Gun triggers don't pull themselves. God does not will that some are born in poverty, and others are born in privilege. These are choices that we all make. Small, yet decisive choices that you and I make each day, and the sum total of all of these small choices. They have ripple effects that ripple across our society, and they shape the world that you and I live in every day. And we may say that our small acts don't matter. But when we say that all together collectively, suffering prevails.

So for us to come together in this season of Advent to announce the coming of our Savior means that we must also denounce evil and injustice. Because to announce the birth of light means to denounce darkness. Annunciation and denunciation go hand in hand, for where we announce the Prince of Peace, we must denounce the weapons of structural violence. For the more we love light and peace, the more we must reject darkness and chaos.

There's an incredible novel, a novel by Mary Doria Russell, entitled *A Thread of Grace*. The novel takes place between 1943 and 1945, and it tells the story of how northwestern Italian peasants, nuns, and Catholic priests provided comfort and sanctuary to Jews from Rome in Eastern Europe following Mussolini's surrender. There was a Jewish rabbi named Iacopo Soncini. And though he was then living underground, he continued to teach and serve the souls of this Jewish community and exiles hiding in the mountains.

And what kept Iacopo going was a pretty straightforward philosophy about life. He put it this way. He said, "When the preponderance of human beings choose to act with justice, generosity, and kindness, then love and decency will prevail. But when we opt for power, greed, and indifference to the suffering of others, war, poverty, and cruelty will prevail."

Iacopo understood that his Italian neighbors who risked their life and limb to provide them shelter, they were making a choice, and they were making a choice each and every day. They could have said, we're just poor, simple people. We can't make a difference. They could have said, the German forces are just too strong, we better protect ourselves up here in the mountains. And they could have said, we better not run afoul of the law. We should try this a long legal means.

But in the words of one of the Jewish peasant women in the story, she said, "If one needs to tell a lie or break a law to save a life, so be it. For God's love for every precious human being tips the scales of justice toward compassion over the rule of any human law."

My brothers and sisters, it's this tradition of people with moral courage, who have voices to speak out. It's this tradition of moral courage of civil disobedience. It's this rich history communities of faith that have stepped up and spoke out when it came to protecting human life. When the law said, no room, there were people of faith who quoted the words of Jesus. "Come unto me, all you who are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."

May this Christmas, may this beautiful holiday season remind us all the ways that we have failed to make room for others. May this Christmas remind us of all of the angels who have stood at our doors and knocked and we failed to answer. May this Christmas then cause us to open our arms and open our hearts and receive the Christ Child anew.

How do we do this? We do this by making room for those who Christ cares about the most. For when we look at the most vulnerable among us, and we make room, we're living a generous gospel.