

Riverside United Church  
December 24, 2017

Scripture Lesson: Luke 2: 1-20

Prayer of Illumination:

God of Life, may the words of my mouth,  
and the meditations of all our minds and hearts,  
lead us to deeper understanding of you,  
and the love you call us to live. Amen.

**“Knock, Knock, Who’s There?”**

A couple of weeks ago, a group of us gathered for Pondering at the Pub and we discussed the questions and comments we had about the Christmas story. At one point, I asked a “discussion prompting question” - “Which is your favourite character or which character in the story do you most identify with?”

One of the great things about this story is that over time the cast of characters has grown as we have imagined the story. We have combined Luke’s account and Matthews account and so we usually have the wise man arriving just after the shepherds. The reference to “no room “ in the inn has led us to add an innkeeper to the cast. And there are pageants written from the perspective of the innkeepers child, or the stable boy.

The story invites wonder and imagination. Biblical scholars agree that this story is more legend than factual - and so that invites the imagination. While very little of it happened as described, that does not diminish the power of the truth it proclaims. It is a story of wonder, a story that invites us into the holy vulnerabilities and love.

As we talked about the story, the character that was in my mind was the innkeeper and I wasn’t the only one who mentioned him/her. Is there room for the birth of the Christ child in our lives and hearts? The innkeeper made a choice to close the door or find a way to allow hospitality, and openness to the Holy to be his vocation. In a world of apathy and indifference, fear and hostility, who is playing the innkeeper in the pageant, in our world?

I recently discovered a song by Lennie Gallant - who is a Maritime folk singer - who has a song entitled, “The Innkeeper”. The song imagines the story of one the innkeepers who turned Mary and Joseph away.:

It was cold the night it happened  
 I was tired, it was late  
 I'd served too much wine to travelers  
 I could barely tolerate  
 Through the shouts and drunken laughter  
 Heard a knock upon the door  
 There was something desperate in the sound  
 That I chose to ignore  
 Then again I heard the knocking  
 Like a hammer on my heart  
 Flung the door open in anger  
 I peered out into the dark

I could tell there was no profit  
 To be made from what was there  
 Nothing but a tired and worried man  
 So dusty and threadbare  
 On a donkey there behind him  
 Sat a woman full with child  
 Her time has come, he said to me  
 Might we rest here for a while  
 Again I heard the knocking  
 Like a hammer on my heart  
 But I said I had no room for them  
 And bade them to depart

Was the light from lamps within the inn  
 Or somewhere in the sky  
 I saw her face turn towards mine  
 I looked into her eyes  
 My knees began to weaken  
 My hands began to shake  
 Then I felt I'd be forgiven  
 For all of my mistakes  
 And again I heard the knocking  
 Like a hammer on my heart  
 But voices beckoned me inside the inn  
 And I left them in the dark

Through the night I felt the lifting  
 Of some weight upon my soul  
 By some power that was stronger than  
 The darkness could control  
 I ran out into the street  
 Enquired at every other inn  
 It seemed that they'd been turned away  
 From every place they'd been  
 Again I heard the knocking  
 Like a hammer on my heart  
 Then I heard a baby's cry  
 From somewhere in the dark

I found them in a stable  
 Kings and shepherds gathered round  
 It seemed there was no room  
 For the likes of me there to be found  
 I could not understand it  
 But I had to see the child  
 When the mother bade me to come near  
 I swear I saw him smile  
 Then I heard what sounded like  
 A thousand chains breaking apart  
 And a door now swinging open  
 Letting light enter my heart  
 Enter my heart  
 Enter

Again I heard the knocking like a hammer on my heart ... Have you ever had an idea, a concern that has knocked on your heart?

As we gather this night, and ponder anew this story, what is knocking on the door of our hearts and lives? What door of possibility, hospitality, compassion, love is waiting to be opened?

It might be the pain of grief ...

It might be the longing for reconciliation out of brokenness ...

It might be the search for meaning, for understanding ..

It may be the need to express gratitude for the blessing of our lives ...

It may be gratitude for others having opened doors of understanding ..

It may be fear of uncertainty looking into the future ...

As we approach the manger, there a variety of realities. There may be various times when we have been too busy, too certain, too cynical, too afraid - to enter into the wonder and mystery known in this story of the birth and promise of God's vulnerability and profound love. This story of Jesus' birth is a breakthrough story in how we understand God dwelling with us and among us.

There is something about this story, about this silent night, this holy night - that invites us to enter into eternal truth and hope.

A baby's cry from somewhere in the dark ... a smile ... a glimpse of holiness and peace - and our hearts open and let the light of Holy Mystery and Wonder enter and compassion, gratitude, and grace become the gifts of our hearts.

What child IS this?