

It's Creche Sunday and we've got several Nativity Sets on display. I'll be honest, the part of the birth narrative that has always bothered me is that there was no room at the inn.

Why was there no room at the inn for Mary and Joseph? Was it that a pregnant woman who could possibly give birth and disturb other travelers wasn't welcome there? Was it that Joseph didn't have enough money for a room? Was it that no one was willing to give up a room? (On the Boston subway, even the toughest characters will relinquish their seats for pregnant women, women with small children, and elderly folks.) In her time of need, why couldn't Mary get a room?

We don't know because the text doesn't tell us. I started wondering about that innkeeper. Maybe he's been maligned. Maybe, just maybe, instead of being the 'bad guy' for keeping Mary and Joseph and Jesus out of the inn, maybe he foreshadows all that will come.

Maybe the innkeeper was fully present to Mary and her condition. Maybe he offered her peace—she would have a place to stay. Even if there was no room at the inn, maybe he suggested that they could take shelter in the stable. Maybe he offered her hope—that she wouldn't have to go through childbirth alone so far from home. Maybe he woke up his wife and other women and asked them to assist Mary. Maybe that innkeeper even gave her the provisions she'd have immediate need of. He could have provided those bands of cloth that Mary swaddled Jesus in.

The text doesn't tell us any of this, but it also doesn't say that this didn't happen. Jesus taught us that presence matters. Jesus taught us that empathy matters. Jesus taught us that kindness matters. Given all we know about Jesus and God's divine care for Mary, a young girl who found favor with God, isn't it possible that this could have happened? When you have the opportunity to fill in the blanks, will you fill them in with compassion and kindness?

There was no room, but God showed up anyway. Even when there was no room. This is good news for us when we think we're so self-sufficient and we don't need anyone...and we don't need God. God will show up anyway.

I want to tell you about another time there was 'no room at the inn'. On the night of the Festival of Lights Parade, we were outside handing out popcorn and cards listing our Christmas services. Sherry McConnell happened to be down by the monument and heard the PA announcer inviting people to "Go meet Santa after the parade—at First Parish Church"...only we knew nothing about Santa being at church and there was no room at the Inn. We had a concert in the sanctuary and a private event in Fellowship Hall. There was no room, but Santa was going to show up anyway. A handful of us got into high gear and we decked out my office with arrangements from W&G. I was wearing my 'pastor' baseball cap and someone approached me to ask where Santa would be. She was carrying a box full of cookies which we placed on the round table in the office building. I set up two chairs for Santa and kiddies (we have a Safe Church policy! That means no kids sit on Santa's lap) and some folks greeted, while others

handed out the Christmas event cards. I took pictures of families with Santa and all was well. There was no room at the Inn, but we made some anyway.

Your holy homework may not be something for which you can prepare. When there is no room, I want you to consider how you can make room. Blessed be and amen.