

**Christmas Eve sermon @ Bethesda United Methodist Church, Baltimore, Maryland
24 December 2022**

"Surprise, surprise!"

We've used this Latin American service of Las Posadas for several years on Christmas Eve.

We're not doing that this year, but still, it makes an important point. The theme is of outsiders waiting to get in, and insiders saying "No," and then gradually, with scriptures, the scene changes, and the strangers, Mary and Joseph, are welcomed, the lights come on, and we share supper together with Christmas carols.

Even though we're not doing that this year, that Las Posadas service from the sixteenth century Roman Catholic Church in Latin America carries weight on Christmas Eve.

It makes an important point: This night is about hospitality, and its opposite.

In fact, as one commentator says, there is a sad silence amid all the hallelujahs and shepherds and heavenly hosts. Here, in the pain of labor, in rough surroundings, far from home, one wishes for just one angel by Mary's side. But, as the commentator puts it, faith is often one angel short, and we are left to follow through our assigned role and then to "ponder these things in our hearts," as Mary did.

If we can cut through religious trappings tonight, we'll be better off:

There are too many poor people. We're not yet good at sharing.

Those are simple, fundamental facts of our time.

Deciding to treat one another as equals, sit down together, is still a big deal.

If we don't blow ourselves up first, we'll get better at sharing.

Tonight Mary teaches us that, reminding us what we already know: That there's enough. Nobody needs to grab; nobody should have to stay out in the cold.

There are people who believe this, people who live their lives generously. They're making history. Little cell groups like Bethesda.

Can anyone be surprised at the goodwill they achieve?

I watch it here: The more we do, the more we share, the better we get along.

I'm waiting to see if we take in more money, too, with this kind of attitude!

It's probably not that simple. We have to remember that God is doing a lot of things at once, so we may not see results very clearly or quickly....

Somebody's learning unselfishness; someone else is nursing a sick husband...

...but it's coming!

Isn't that the message tonight? Aren't the angels and heavenly hosts just screen-savers on the global computer, just background, affirming what we already know?

Sharing is a basic part of being human. It's much more important than who owns what.

Freedom doesn't consist of owning things and doing what I want to with them.

Freedom comes from knowing some kid in East Baltimore has enough to eat, and that some Somalian mother gets AIDS medicine.

We are bound together; one world. "Send not to ask for whom the bell tolls/ The bell tolls for thee."

We can pretty that up with religious language: "God dwells among us, lowly with the lowly;" but it's the same with or without insider terms.

We've got to get along; we've got to share; there's plenty, if we don't grab.

There's no real surprise.

We've known this since kindergarten. We're programmed for equality.

It may be lonesome accepting that news, and living by it, at times; but anything true is worth suffering for.

There are people --- some of them right here --- who will help.

The stable is not quite so lonely now.

There's a community of believers, where we fit in.

We already know the routine. We just practiced it, sitting down together, opening the door for one another, turning on the lights.

Next thing you know, we'll be sharing a meal.

Let's do that now, through Jesus Christ.

Amen. ***Arthur Dan Gleckler***

