



December 24, 2011  
Christmas Eve (5)  
Pastor Mark Toone  
Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church

## *The Creep That Stole Christmas* Luke 2:1-7

Did you do anything new this Christmas? We did. This Christmas, Chapel Hill decided to partner with the Salvation Army. Over 600 Chapel Hill folks signed up to ring bells in front of local grocery stores. If you stuck some money in a red bucket, it might have been one of us that said, "Merry Christmas!"

Dennis and Jeanne Trittin and their teenage daughter, Lauren, were first-time ringers. They only had two bells so they took turns. And when the girls were ringing, Dennis embarrassed his daughter by serenading the shoppers with goofy Christmas songs, like a Donald Duck rendition of that very religious Christmas carol, Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer. This goofiness went on for about an hour until Dennis saw some friends and went over to chat with them.

But when he turned back around, he discovered two police officers talking to his wife. They said, "We received a report that some strange man was harassing the Salvation Army ladies. "Is that the man?" (Pointing to Den.) Jeanne exclaimed, "That strange man is my husband!" Lauren said, "He's my dad!" It turned out okay... although, I think Lauren missed a great opportunity for teenage revenge. "That man? I've never seen him before in my life...and, yes, he IS bothering me!"

Our theme for the last few weeks has been "The Creep That Stole Christmas." We're not talking about this kind of creep. (Den). Or this. (Grinch.) We're talking about the things in your life that creep in and steal the joy and beauty and the meaning of what Christmas is really all about.

Some of you tonight are being good sports. You are here with your family to create some memories. But the truth is...the pressures and heartbreaks of life are creeping in on you...crowding in on your Christmas. Maybe you would describe your life with two words that come right out of our Bible story: NO ROOM! Let's read that once more: While Mary and Joseph were in Bethlehem, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Mary was nine months pregnant and counting. But when they arrived in Bethlehem everything was sold out! Joseph didn't call ahead for reservations. He didn't book a room on Expedia. And by the time they dragged their weary bodies into town, after an 80 miles walk from Nazareth, the only inn was full to the rafters.

Our hearts go out to them, right? They are exhausted. Mary is about to pop. Every mom feels complete empathy, right? And every dad who remembers how frantic and stupid he felt when the babies were born...we are pretty empathetic, too, right guys? Our son,

Cooper, was born 16 years ago tomorrow. A Christmas baby. Believe me...I felt plenty stupid at the time.

But there is someone else in this story who deserves our empathy. Who? The innkeeper! Imagine the bragging rights his family would have had for generations to come. He could have put a plaque on the wall that said, "Jesus, savior of the world, born right here!" That would have been great for business! But seriously, imagine the privilege of participating in one of the greatest moments in human history. To be able to say, "I played a role in the salvation of the world." But he would not be able to say that. Why? No room! No room in his inn. No room in his busy life. No room for Jesus.

Now...that may not be exactly true. Mary and Joseph ended up in a barn. Maybe it was his barn! He couldn't kick out a paying customer to accommodate these kids...but wasn't heartless. He did have a barn out back. Better than nothing, right? Sanitary? Not quite? Stinky? Very. But it was the only room he had. And so, the Son of God was born on a floor caked with animal poop and laid in a feed trough for a crib.

And we are sooo offended, aren't we? We shake our head in dismay. We wag our fingers in disdain. We cluck and tsk and assure ourselves that WE would never have been so rude; that WE would have made room. Really? Who here tonight doesn't have a life that is full to the edges with lots of really important stuff? [Go to stanchions arranged in a square] This is my life. It is only so big. Only so much capacity. And I fill it up. Volunteers? [Hand out signs and move them inside the stanchion square.] Inside my life I put my wife, my kids, my extended family. I put my job. Hobbies. Sports. Finances. Citizenship. Reputation. Ambition. But I put other stuff in, too. Disappointment. Guilt. Debt. Anxiety. Depression.

The "Occupy" movement has been in the news for months now. Occupy Wall Street. Occupy Seattle. Occupy Gorst. Well...we have a lot that occupies our lives, don't we? And often ...we DON'T really think about it. Stuff just appears. Our lives just get ...occupied... and before we know it, there's no margin left. No room in our inn.

(Manger is brought out) Now...what do we do? Where does Jesus fit in all of this? Sometimes we have no room for Jesus because we don't see the need. Maybe you feel that way. Christmas is a sweet holiday; great for family and kids. But you just don't buy this stuff about God becoming a man to save the world. If you think Christmas is a myth, then obviously, you aren't going to make any room for Jesus. Why waste the space? But I'll bet that MOST here tonight don't feel that way. You may not be very churchy... (after all, your life is crowded, right?) But you DO think something important happened on Christmas. You might believe that Jesus is special. You might believe the things we sing: "Joy to the world, the LORD is come." BUT, still...you have no room!

So what do you do? If you decide it would probably be a good thing to have Jesus in your life...but your life looks like this...how do you do it? This way? Try to shove in... cram in. Or maybe...you take a couple things out until you can at least fit Jesus into the barn of your life. The problem is...it's only a matter of time before you put some more stuff, right? "Last in, First out!" Jesus will get squeezed right back out.

OR...you can do what I like to do. [Expand stanchions.] Just expand the borders of your life. Figure out how to do more...do it faster...sleep less... squeeze tighter...make more room

to fit in more stuff. And we just keep expanding (act out) and making our life bigger and fuller...and crazier. But pretty soon, you're back to where you were before. No room. Or worse. You've had a heart attack. Gotten a divorce. Or two. Become an alcoholic. Or dealt with your crazy boundaries in some other unhealthy way.

You know... Borders Book Store has closed. Maybe we can buy the name and add to it to describe the kind of lifestyle we pretend we can live: Borders and Hoarders. Just keep expanding my life; just keep filling it up with more stuff.

Is that the way to make room for Jesus? Nope. Actually, there is only ONE way to do this. Clear the decks. Start by putting Christ right at the center. And THEN... fill up your life. With Jesus at the center of your life, there will be room for the right things. (Marriage, family, etc.) But here's something else that is wonderful. All of the awful stuff? We can bring that to him, too. The anxiety. The disappointment. The guilt. The depression. All of it... the good and the worthy...and the bad and the unworthy...we lay it before Jesus and say, "Please...will you take it? I can't do it without you. Not even the things that matter... I can't do any of it right without you. Jesus, please take my life and order it and border it." It's too bad that the innkeeper was so focused on making a shekel that he couldn't do more to help this young family in need. But it's REALLY too bad that ... he missed out on the chance to participate in the greatest drama in human history: the salvation of the world! Because there was no room in his life.

Is your life so full that it's almost impossible to squeeze Jesus in somewhere? That's too bad. But what's really too bad is, God wants you to be a part of what he is doing in his world...and you are missing out! God wants you to be a part of something greater than yourself...and you are missing out. Because you don't have the room.

Some of you came tonight for an inspirational holiday evening. A lot of you came to celebrate the birth of the Savior of the world. And most of us don't have much room in our lives. But just imagine ...if God had something more in mind for you? Just imagine if God said, "I don't want you to stick my Son in the outbuildings of your life. Out with all the junk you can't bring yourself to get rid of. He deserves better than that. And so do you. I want my Son to be in the center of your life." Well...that is EXACTLY what God is saying to you tonight.

But, honestly...do you have any room for Jesus? And if you do, have you shoved him out into a shed somewhere with the rest of the Christmas decorations? To be pulled out once in a while when it seems appropriate? How's that working for you? Do you think there could be more to your life if you put Jesus at the center of it? Invite Christ into your crazy life. No one can sort it out like he can.

Have you been thinking about what I said? Asking yourself the question, "Is there any room in my life for Jesus? Maybe you would say, "I'm still not interested. I like my life the way it is." Could I challenge you to at least pick up one of these packets and just try reading the story yourself? Try reading what the Bible says about Jesus and see if it makes you more interested.

Or maybe this has stirred something in you; you want to know more. It might take some courage but what if you signed up to come to Christianity Explored? This class might change your life!

Or maybe your next easy step would be to make room on Christmas Day for Christ...to come back tomorrow morning and join us as 10:00 for HIS Birthday celebration.  
Or maybe...you are ready to make a commitment tonight. To make room for Jesus tonight. As you light the candle in a moment, offer a prayer like this: "Jesus, I want to make room for you. Help me!"