

Matthew 2:7-12
What Shall I Offer?
Rev. Jonathan P. Cornell
12-22-19

The journalist Dorothy Day says it this way: “it is no use saying we are born two thousand years too late to give room to Christ. Nor will those who are alive at the end of the world have been born too late. Christ is always with us, always asking for room in our hearts.”

We can all remember when Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem to give birth to the baby there was what? No room at the inn. This is the question that is asked of each of us, to you children, your parents, and your grand and great grandparents alike. Is there room for Jesus here? Is there room for Jesus here (heart)?

But now, in our lives, instead of a young unwed, pregnant couple coming to seek a place to have a baby, we are asked the question in the eyes of boys and girls in our class who don't have friends; neighbors who live alone and don't have many who spend time with them; it's in the eyes of colleagues who struggle to find meaning in their work. God speaks to us through the feet of those who need food or shelter, for the soldiers, or the outcast who needs help.

It's possible for us to bring gifts to Jesus just like the Shepherds and wisemen. I'm sure the Shepherds didn't just pop in to lay eyes on Jesus, the pffew look at the time, the sheep need penned for the night. No, you can bet they did whatever they could to make the Holy Family comfortable. The things that the friends of Jesus did for him then, we can do today as well. Peter's mother-in-law cooked a meal; Matthew the tax collector prepared a feast. Mary and Marth and Lazarus gave him friendship and hospitality so that Jesus always felt that he had a place to go when he needed a retreat.

But I know it's easy for us to imagine making a place for Jesus and Mary and Joseph when it was the Holy Spirit who was announcing their arrival. When they're described as appearing with the sun a crown of 12 stars and the moon on her feet. If this showed up at your doorstep, obviously you're letting her in. But what about the inconvenient person, the person who is difficult to love, the person who provides no advancement to your social standing, what about the person who is forgettable.

We are not born too late, we can make a place and provide for Jesus and his road weary, anxiety-laden parents just as the shepherds did; just as the wisemen who brought gold (the emblem of a king to make up for the crown of thorns that would one day be thrust down upon his head), incense (the symbol of praise and worship in the temple to make up for the mocking and spitting of the crowds), and myrrh (to heal and sooth the wounds he would incur from head to toe).

In the first few generations of Christians who lived after his death and resurrection faith was this white hot flame that warmed more than those who kept it burning. In every house there was a room that was kept ready for any stranger who might ask for shelter, it was even called the stranger's room. This was not because these people thought that if they kept a space that they could somehow keep the memory of him alive. Nor because the person whom they gave shelter reminded them of Christ, but because—plain and simple and stupendous fact—he was Christ.

We are not born too late, we can bring these two, Jesus would tell us how later in Matthew 25

I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? ³⁸ And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers,^[1] you did it to me.’

This is a picture of a man named Guy Bryant and his son Romario. Guy is 61 years old and throughout his career he served as an administrator at Child welfare services in New York City. And so he had helped to process paperwork and placements for kids who had gotten old enough and needed to be placed outside the system—that was what his job was.

Turns out that after 31 years of doing the thing he was good at he thought to himself, maybe there’s something else I’m supposed to do with this. And in the ultimate example of taking your work home with you, there was an 18 year old who was in a homeless shelter who had gone from family to family because of his bad behavior and would continually get into fights. So Guy Bryant said to Romario, “why don’t you come and live with me for a while? And call me pops.”

That was 2007, in 2019 Guy Bryant has had over 50 children over the course of 12 years come and live with him in his New York City apartment. At one time he had as many as 9 children entrusted to his care. He once had a reporter ask him: “what do you do with 9 kids?”

“You know what you do, you cook a lot.” He didn’t make a big deal about it, he just said that if you have room in your heart and in your home, this is the kind of thing that you do.

One of the things that struck me about Guy was that all 50 of the kids who are now no longer kids have a key to his apartment—many of them still come over for Sunday dinner at his home which is now slightly larger in square footage, but infinitely larger because of the welcome that is known by those who call Guy Bryant Pops. At one point in the interview Romario looked at him and said, “you know you’re my Pops right?”

“I know, and I love you to death.”

You are not born too late. **Greater love has no one than this, that a man would lay down his life for his friends**, you are not born into God’s family, you are chosen you are claimed, you are adopted. You not only have a home in Christ, you have a family in Christ. This is what Jesus does for you, it’s what he does for you, and you, and you, and you.

So bring your gifts, bring your heart, open your home, and your life to him—in all his many colors, shapes, and sizes, because you are not born too late. Amen.