

Making Room

December 9, 2018: The Second Sunday of Advent

[Baruch 5:1-9](#); [Philippians 1:3-11](#); [Luke 3:1-6](#)

Wow. I've said it before and I'm just going to keep saying it: Wow. Wow.

Wednesday night: Wow!! The celebration of our new ministry together was extraordinary. It was above and beyond, to be sure, but it was not superficial; it was so special, but it was without pretense. It was extraordinary because it was exactly you, and it was quite me, and together...Wow. God is with us.

To prepare, you sent invitations, you shared the Facebook event, you called friends and neighbors. You gathered branches and vines outside, gilded them with gold spray paint, rolled them up into spheres, intertwined them with sparkling lights, and suspended them from the ceiling in Ledyard Hall. You set out tables and draped them with technicolor tablecloths--the most fabulous tablecloths I've ever seen! You set out torches and spent hours cleaning the dried wax off the glass so that the candles would glow. You cleaned and ironed linens; you moved furniture; you practiced lots of extra music. You baked cookies at home and brought them in. You made punch of one kind and another; you set out stemware. You handled many calls, emails, and texts; you created spreadsheets. You cared, you smiled, you cried, you laughed; at times, in those days leading up, you sighed (and I was right there with you!), wondering how exactly all of this would come together; you prayed; we prayed.

You did all of this not just to keep busy (God knows there are way too many ways to do just keep busy); that's not what you were doing. You did all of these things to make room--to make room for me, to make room for our future together, to make room for all of those who are not even here yet.

As you prepared, I heard you asking one another: So who's coming? Who needs to know about these new things that God is doing? Who should we invite, who can we include? How--through our words, through our space, through our sounds, through beauty, through warmth, through joy--can we embrace each one who walks through these doors to say, "Welcome home to Christ Church Detroit. There is room for you here."

Which is to say, if I may be so bold to echo Isaiah and John the Baptist, that you have been and will continue to prepare to "see the salvation of God."

What does it mean to see the "salvation" of God? It's one of those really churchy words. And, I've always wondered, do Isaiah and John say we need to "prepare the way of the Lord" in order to do so? I mean, if the Lord is the Lord, won't he just come in? Won't our almighty God--like a close friend or a pushy neighbor--just show up in our home whether we've cleaned it or not? Why does God need us to prepare the way? What does it mean right here, right now, to prepare the way of the Lord?

I think it has a lot to do with making room. And in fact the word "salvation" in Hebrew means "making room"--isn't that awesome? Making room, listening, making room for other voices to be heard.

I heard an awesome example of this earlier this weekend, listening to the Community Chorus of Detroit (that Ed was conducting and a number of you were singing in) in a concert called *Gloria: A Concert for Peace*, which set Vivaldi's *Gloria* alongside and interspersed with African-

American spirituals of the same time. Can you imagine, there in Venice, Antonio Vivaldi was writing the *Gloria*, among so many other things, and in Africa and in the colonies enslaved peoples were also singing to their God. What moved me so much was that the words that everybody was singing, unbeknownst to the others, were so similar. For example, in the middle of the program, there was a spiritual "Great God Almighty", which goes something like this:

*God, great God, almighty mighty. Riding in a hurry, bullwhip in one hand, riding, riding captain, cowhide in the other...Hear the captain coming...running and hiding. O hear my cry O Lord, please hear my plea...Please don't you kill me, captain, don't you kill me...I'm fighting till my death. I'm gonna keep on a-running till my very last breath, shouting, "Great God, almighty mighty, great God almighty God!"*

Followed by Vivaldi's Latin: *Lord God almighty, Lamb of God, the Son of the Father, who grants us redemption, and from our worldly sins forgives us. Lord have mercy on us, we beseech Thee. Forgive us for our transgressions. Hear us, Lord, heed our supplications, O Lord.*

Followed by: *There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole; there is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin sick soul.*

John the Baptist, today, does not mince his words when urging us that repentance, self-examination, listening are what make room for God. Repentance, examination, and listening are what prepare the way for the salvation of God, and *every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God. All flesh shall see it together.*