

**PERSPECTIVES:  
THE OVERCOMMITTED  
LUKE 2:1-7  
DECEMBER 16, 2012**

Have you heard of Las Posadas?

It's a Hispanic Catholic tradition.

It's about the travels of Joseph and Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem, and their search for lodging.

“Posada” is Spanish for lodging or accommodations.

In Spain, Mexico and other places it is a nine day celebration.

In a full-fledged Las Posadas,

each family in a neighborhood will schedule a night for the Posada to be held at their home,  
starting on the 16th of December and finishing on the 24th.

Every home has a nativity scene and the hosts of the Posada act as the innkeepers.

The neighborhood children and adults are the pilgrims,

who have to request lodging by

going house to house singing a traditional song about the pilgrims.

Sometimes they carry statuettes of Joseph leading a donkey, on which Mary is riding.

Sometimes individual plays the roles of Joseph and Mary.

At each house, the resident responds by refusing them lodging, also in song.

I'm not sure how you sing about, “There's no room for you here; go away.”

But they do.

Until finally the weary travelers reach the designated site for the party,

where Mary and Joseph are finally recognized and allowed to enter.

Once the "innkeepers" let them in to stay in their stable,

the group of guests come into the home and kneel around the Nativity scene to pray.

There are local variations,

such as including a pinata or a live donkey,

children carrying poinsettias, and the procession including musicians.

But in all the traditional Las Posadas one of the key roles is that of the innkeeper.

What do we know from the Bible about the innkeeper?

**LUKE 2:1-7**

There are a lot of interesting and significant details in these few verses.

We're given some specifics in terms of time and place.

This means the story of Jesus is not some Greek or Roman myth,

not just a matter of philosophy, not a parable,

but real events set in human history.

It's during the reign of Caesar Augustus, who was known as “the bringer of peace.”

Of course, it was the Pax Romana, the peace of Rome,

an empire where dissenters were dealt with quickly and harshly.

But it was peace of a sort.

It was during his reign that one was born who would be known as “the prince of peace.” (Is.9:6)

The place of Jesus' birth would be Bethlehem,

the home town of King David generations ago,

Israel's greatest king.

And the angels would sing, “On earth peace among people on whom God's favor rests.” (Lk.2:14)

All of this says Jesus is the real sovereign king,

the bringer of true peace.

In this setting we hear of a census, counting every person,

probably to apportion how much tax money needed to be collected from each region of the empire.

For some reason, everyone was supposed to return to the town of their family's origin to be counted.

Joseph and Mary were powerless before the greatest power on the face of the earth.

Again, there is a contrast between Caesar's empire on the one hand,

and Jesus whose compassion became legendary on the other hand.

We also get some particulars about Jesus' birth.

He is Mary's firstborn child.

He was wrapped in cloths,

swaddled to give him a secure, almost womb-like feeling, so he'd not cry much.

And he was placed in a manger, a nice word for a feed trough,

"because there was no room for him in the inn."

He's born into humble circumstances, a stable.

You get the idea that he would understand our lives and neighborhood

better than any of our presidential candidates.

But in these verses do we learn anything about the innkeeper?

He's not even mentioned in Luke's Gospel.

But we might have one hint about him.

There was no room for them in the inn.

An "inn" then was not the Hyatt.

It was not Motel 6.

It was a large sleeping room attached to the innkeeper's home.

Weary travelers would, for a fee, all sleep together in that room.

Well, every space in his sleeping room was already filled,

and the innkeeper apparently did nothing to make more room for Jesus.

"There was no room for them in the inn."

He was already fully committed, maybe overcommitted.

The innkeeper did not recognize what God was doing so very close by him.

All he knew was that he was busy, with a full house of guests.

There were customers to deal with, chores to be tended to.

And along comes this couple,

a man and his very pregnant young wife.

It was late,

they clearly didn't have much money,

and this pregnancy thing could become a real inconvenience.

And besides, the sleeping room was already full.

"No room at the inn.

I'm already overcommitted.

The best I can do is let you take a little space out in the stable.

A little hay to pad the floor, a corner away from the animals,

a feed trough nearby."

Because his place was full, because his life was so full,

he missed the coming of the savior of the world.

Angels sang, shepherds visited,

but he so busy elsewhere, his life so full, that he missed it.

Have you made room for Jesus in your life?

We live hurried, busy, fast-paced lives.

Overfull and overcommitted.

Places to go, people to see, things to do.

Jobs, kids events, seeing the doctor or dentist or hair cutter,

church events, get the oil changed, pick up the laundry from the cleaners.

With the ever-present electronic media,  
     smart phones with email and internet access,  
         we have to screen out more data than ever.  
 And it only gets worse as we get closer to Christmas,  
     because there's shopping to do, parties to attend, special events to prepare for.  
         Ho-ho-ho.  
 In the midst of all that,  
     have you made room for Jesus?  
 This week there was the horrific school shooting in Connecticut.  
     We've been turning to television, radio, internet news pages,  
         to get more information, more commentary,  
         more interviews with grieving people.  
 Did we stop for a moment of quiet  
     to listen for God's voice in the midst of all those other voices?  
 Every now and then I'll have a time when I'm at the church three, four, even five nights a week.  
     A committee meeting, a planning meeting, Administrative Council,  
         praise band rehearsal, Bible study.  
     It's not every week, but every now and then.  
 And guess what I'm tempted to cut back on?  
     Time for relationships.  
     Time for conversations with Jill.  
     Time with God.  
     If I don't make intentional decisions to make and guard time with Jill and with God,  
         those relationships will be shortchanged.  
 The universal human tendency, when life moves too fast, is to skim on relationships.  
     Don't go deep, just skim,  
         touch here and there, but don't go deep.  
     Because going deep requires real time.  
         Not that phrase "quality time" that we use to make ourselves feel better,  
             but significant uninterrupted time,  
                 with the TV off, no smart phones,  
                 no looking at my watch, no distractions.  
             A real face-to-face, heart-to-heart conversation,  
                 talking and listening.  
     But with time at a premium, who's got time for relationships?  
         People and God may get only our leftovers,  
             if that.  
             Maybe I could text God while driving to the next thing.  
                 (PLEASE don't!)

C.S. Lewis' book *The Screwtape Letters* is a series of letters written by a senior demon named Screwtape  
 to his nephew, Wormwood, a younger and less experienced demon,  
     who is charged with guiding a man toward Satan and away from God.  
 Wormwood wants to take the traditional demonic route of tempting the man to blatant sin.  
 But Screwtape counsels him to be more subtle, to move gradually.  
     Befuddle and confuse the man.  
     Get him not to be outright evil,  
         but to be passive and irresponsible.  
     Move him just an inch at a time.  
     He points to the great effectiveness of distracting the man,  
         not by inherently bad things,

but with things of lesser value.  
Distract him from God.  
Busy him with other things.

Screwtape could be messing around in many of our lives.  
He could be messing with our whole culture.  
He could have been working behind the scenes  
to keep that innkeeper from seeing what God was doing.

Imagine if Moses had been so focused on tending his sheep that he did not  
stop, turn aside, and take a closer look at that burning bush. (Ex.3)

“I’ve got sheep to tend.  
I’ve got to find some good grass and water for them.  
I’ve got to keep a close eye on a couple of ewes that are ready to lamb.  
There are thorn bushes around here that they can get tangled in, unable to get loose.  
And the whole bunch of them tend to wander off where wolves can get them.  
I’m already overcommitted.  
I don’t have time to stop and look at some little brush fire.”

And off he went, super busy with his work,  
and probably feeling pretty good about it,  
because he was so important to those sheep and their owner.

What would have happened?  
Oh, God would still get done what he wanted to get done.  
But he would have raised up someone else to work through,  
and Moses would not even be a footnote in our Bible.  
Moses would have missed out on so much.

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Do you want to be the one to see the burning bush, the one who would find room at the inn?

If you want to see what God is doing in the world,

you’ll have to get very honest with yourself and answer a few tough questions:

1. What has me so busy that I skim on spending time with God?  
Is it my job, my kids, school involvements, a sport that I or the kids are involved in?  
The television, computer or smart phone?
2. Why do I allow those things to loom so large in my life?  
Do I only feel good about me when I’m doing?  
Am I running from what I might hear if I was quiet and still for a moment?
3. And finally...  
Are these things really more important than being close to God?

Once you have honestly diagnosed your current condition,

you’ll need to make a conscious decision to do things differently.

No one randomly drifts into true commitment to God.

If you would go against the current,

you’ll have to willfully choose to extract yourself from life’s overcommitted busyness,  
so you can spend time nurturing your relationship with your heavenly Father.

Is that really what you want for yourself?

Is that what you are consciously choosing?

If you are choosing that,

then you need some practical strategies to do so.

There is not a one-size-fits-all required pattern.

If you’ve got small children,

you’ll need to do things a bit differently from a retiree.

If you’re a stay-at-home mom,

your pattern will necessarily be different from the sales rep who is often on the road.  
 When your family comes to visit for Christmas,  
 you'll need to adjust your routine from what you do during the rest of the year.  
 For me, I find myself fed by spending a few quiet moments early in the morning,  
 reading a few verses or sometimes a whole chapter of the Bible over my first cup of coffee,  
 listening for what God may have to say to me.  
 I don't want to talk to anyone else until I've finished that first cup.  
 But God and I get along pretty good then.  
 If you're not a morning person,  
 find the time of day that will work for you.  
 But at some point you need to digest a little bit of Scripture,  
 and have a chat with the Author of the book.  
 For me, some quiet time in the woods can be a wonderful way to recharge my batteries.  
 Or just to take a little time to sit quietly in the back yard.  
 You might find yourself spiritual fed by reading, by silence,  
 by rolling up your sleeves and serving,  
 by worshiping with others,  
 or the support of an accountability group.  
 Even financial giving, done with the right attitude, can turn your attention toward God.  
 Because, after all, Jesus said,  
 "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."  
 I know of one spiritual exercise specifically aimed at rejecting the busyness of the overcommitted life.  
 It's a practice called "slowing."  
 Slowing is when you intentionally put yourself in a circumstance  
 that forces you to actually slow down.  
 For instance, when you're driving on the highway,  
 put yourself in the right hand lane  
 and go whatever speed the person in front of you is going.  
 No fast lane speeding, no weaving in and out.  
 Stay in the right lane, the slow lane.  
 You can do it in the grocery store, too.  
 You know how, when you're approaching the checkout,  
 you look for the shortest line?  
 Maybe you know which checker is the fastest and which is the slowest.  
 Do you look to see how full the grocery carts are?  
 Intentionally put yourself in the longest, slowest, fullest lane.  
 Don't look at your watch.  
 Look at the people around you.  
 See what you can discern about their lives, and pray for them.  
 Pray for the mom whose children are giving her fits,  
 that God would give her grace and patience.  
 Pray for the seasoned citizen who appears to be buying food for one,  
 that God would enrich their life with friends and family.  
 Pray for the checker and the bagger,  
 that they would see the value in what they do  
 and feel good about their work.  
 Macy's Department Stores are having a special 48 hour sale, starting December 21 and ending on the 23<sup>rd</sup>.  
 It's 48 hours of non-stop shopping availability,  
 a holy vigil of materialism.

At Northwest Hills we're having a 72 hour vigil to focus on God this week.

We're calling it "Stop and Breathe."

Starting this Wednesday at 7 p.m. the sanctuary will be open  
and will remain so until next Sunday morning.

Someone will be reading Scripture aloud at all times,  
starting with Genesis 1:1 and going through Revelation 22:21.

If you'd like to be a reader, you can sign up at the Connections Center.

Anyone can come in at any time of day or night to get away from the busyness of life,  
to leave behind that feeling of being rushed and overcommitted.

You can come listen to Scripture and spend time in prayer.

We'll have places where you can write your prayers if you want,  
special opportunities for children's prayers,  
or you can just Stop and Breathe.

In this season of Advent, as we head for Christmas, don't miss the presence and activity of God.

Make room for him at the inn.

Let's sit for a moment of quiet right now.

Listen for the voice of God.

Stop and breathe.