**THE GOOD BOLIVIANO**
**Second Sunday Advent, December 10, 2017, 9:00 am service**
**Deuteronomy 14: 28-29 & Luke 2: 1-7**
**The Church of the Covenant**

Is there room in your heart for the baby Jesus this year?  Or is it too full of other things?  It is the question that is basically posed by the innkeeper in Bethlehem.  The Luke birth narrative has the sad line within it that the Savior of the world was born in a manger, an animal feeding trough, because, as it says, *"There was no place for them in the inn."* (Luke 2: 7)  *"He came to his own home, and his own people received him not." (John 1: 11)*

I am contrasting this with the Old Testament concerns for three categories of people.  Over and over again the Old Testament notes concern for *the "sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow" (Deuteronomy 14: 29)*  The sojourner is that person who comes from another country and happens to be living in our country.  The fatherless are those who are orphans or are abandoned by their parents in some way.  The widow are those women who are unmarried, or who have lost their spouse or who have been divorced by their husband.  God has special concerns for these people because they are disconnected from the land and have no portion in the produce of the land.  They are marginalized, without means of support.  In the culture of that day their only means of survival was to beg on the streets.  So the tithes went to help these categories of people who had no means of support.

I have shared before how when I was in Alexandria, Virginia I befriended a whole group of people from Bolivia, sojourners in our midst.  I helped them with Green Cards and drivers licenses.  I rescued their cars out of the impound lot at midnight.  I discovered I had developed a friendship and a whole ministry to about 70 Bolivians.  It all started when the thought popped into my mind to invite them out to dinner.  Then they hosted my raucous birthday party –guitars and food and singing and dancing until 2:00 a.m. Sunday!  When I moved back to Pittsburgh they all wept, and two carloads of Bolivians just showed up unannounced to help me unpack.  They have a sense of helping one another and community, COMUNIDAD that frankly we have lost as a nation.  They are the Good Bolivianos.  Loyal, kind, strongly religious, rigorous family values, unwavering friends; they are JUNTOS meaning "together"; they will drop whatever they are doing just to come and help.  They will simply say "I help" and they do.  I think America and the church used to be that way...

So last year when my Dad was in the process of dying and his kidneys were shutting down, the care facility lost his dentures.  He was already having trouble eating but now it was almost impossible.  I tried to schedule an appointment to get new dentures and it would take about a month by the time you had multiple appointments and the dentures were made and fitted.  My Dad didn't have a month.  So I called one of the Bolivianos who is a dentist and he said, "I help".  So he piled into his car at 4am with his wife and

two children and came to Washington for Sunday morning at 9am.  He fitted my Dad for dentures, he made the dentures, and then he fitted them so they fit perfectly.  And then he and his family piled into the car and left at 9:00 p.m. that night, arriving home at 1:30 a.m. and needing to get up bright and early the next morning.  Who would do that in this country?  Who would take that much time and rearrange their schedule at the drop of a hat?  Who would have expected that a small kindness I had done more than 15 years before would help my Dad?  When my Mother needed 24-7 in-home caregiving I called Virginia and Ninon and her brother dropped their lives and came in less than two weeks in order to care for my Mother.  Who would do that?  Where would there be people that grateful and compassionate to do such a thing?  When I invited those Bolivianos out for dinner more than 15 years ago who would have ever guessed that the kindness would have been returned more than ten fold?  There are people now in Washington who are Spanish-speakers, waiting for people to reach out to them in kindness.  They are all around us.  Is there room in your heart this Christmas for the baby Jesus?

Another category of person from the Old Testament is the widow.  There are people all around us who are by themselves at Christmas.  They used to have family and now their family lives far away.  Or have passed away.  They may be sitting at home by themselves on Christmas Eve.  They may be alone on Christmas Day.  You'd really have to change your life to include them.  You'd have to radically modify your Christmas traditions to make room for them.  You might have to buy an extra gift.  You might have to set an extra place at the table.  These people are members of our church, they are your next door neighbors, they are people in care facilities and nursing homes who haven't seen what remains of their families in years.  They are all around us.

We make Christmas into this selfish, navel-gazing, holiday tradition, over-the-top gift giving extravaganza that has little or nothing to do with the birth of Jesus Christ into our world.  We make it about ME, not about others. Christmas is not about ME and MY and MINE. If you were the innkeeper on Christmas Eve this year, and you reached out to a Spanish-speaking member of our community, or you made a point of including a widow or an older person at your table and part of your family this year, maybe, just maybe, you might experience what Christmas is really about, and not what we have made it.  Maybe, just maybe, you might make room in the inn for Jesus this year.  Maybe, just maybe Jesus might not be homeless and alone.  Maybe, just maybe all your holiday traditions might not really be that important; maybe they get in the way of discovering The Good Boliviano and the widow or the person who has nowhere to go on Christmas.  Maybe, just maybe there is room in your heart for the Baby Jesus this year????? Amen and Amen.

*By:  The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA*
*IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*