



DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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The Great Stall

Christmas Eve – December 24th, 2008

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John 12:46

I don't know whether it's a macho or reverse-macho thing, but it seems this year people on TV and guys especially that I talk to are scoring points by telling how crazy or even bad this year has been. (I'm not just talking about U of M and Lions fans! ☺) I mean even bigger stuff (I know it's hard to imagine bigger stuff for some of you—Jeremy, Greg, Nate, Sarah...) like people's jobs and savings and credit lines with the stock market plummet and related difficulties. The loss-talk is almost a manly thing: If you've lost a higher percentage does this mean that you had more testosterone-fueled risky investments? If you've *lost* more, does that mean that you can brag about having had more to lose? I'm not saying it's good, but when you see it in God's eyes, maybe the Stall is not such a bad thing.

Here's why: The greater the trouble, the more you see how far God is willing to go to be with His people. When bad news hits, and hits hard, people who don't believe in God derive the wrong lessons from it. What some folks could get panicky over, we can see as God's midcourse correction. Either God is still God, and we are still not, or not. (I'm *not* going to say that again! What a way with words he's got! ☺)

Now, you may have had some nasty things happen since we gathered for Christmas Eve a year ago: Parents in the hospital, loss of your job, heavy stuff in your relationships, health issues, trouble with kids, and on and on. A lot of it just stinks. But, if our purpose in life is to learn how to trust God more, then the value of that increase in pressure is priceless, if you will take the stuff that's tripped you up and stalled you out and made you scared. John 12:46 (LB) "*Jesus [Himself] said, I have come as a Light to shine in this dark world, so that all who put their trust in me will no longer wander in darkness.*"

The basic message of Christianity is that the darkness came because Adam and Eve stalled with God in the Garden of Eden. They rebelled, and creation fell. The news of their crash, though, occupies only one page out of 1000. The rest of the story is what God did after that: Even as the curse came to them, God also made a promise: that one day someone very special would outwit and defeat Satan, and that the earth would one day be restored. The rest of the Bible is the story of how this works out. You are still a part of that epic story. Listen again to the seemingly insignificant verse that was a major turn of events:

Luke 2:7 "*And Mary brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.*"

God has come to the manger stall... This stall is reality. This stall is what you do, when your reservations fall through. When your plans fall through. When you go through a year like 2008. When you are seeking God's best for your life and it calls for uncomfortable conversations or even a lifestyle change. This stall is messiness of reality. Or the boredom of it. When you're waiting on God and nothing seems to be happening. That's this stall. This stall is a place where you've ended up because you know God wants your heart and you've held off. This stall is a place where you've ended up because you ran out of gas and you're burned out. You drove too fast. You're stuck in the left shoulder of the freeway and you're afraid to get out of your car. That's this stall. It's messy. It's crowded. And it stinks. There are too many people and animals in your stall. Or there may be people missing from your stall. But tonight we remember God has come to this stall, and that means God is here. And that means you're in good company in this stall. You just need to realize

He's been here with you all along. God came to the stall, and nothing is the same. For me, this stall is the place...

This stall is the place to release my fears.

What are you worried about? The economy? Your health? Bills? Your kids? The first thing the angel says is this: "Don't be afraid!" Release your anxiety. Let go of your fear. Chill out!" Luke 2:10 *"An angel appeared to the shepherds and they were terrified. But the angel said, 'Do not be afraid!'"* Your fear imprisons you in your stall. There are 365 "Fear not"s in the Bible. One for every day of the year. Corny, but true! God is saying, "Don't be afraid." He's already here. He already knows. You don't need to be afraid of God.

This stall is the place to renew my faith.

The reality of Christmas is Jesus Christ. The angel said Luke 2:10 *"I bring you the most joyful news ever announced, and it is for everyone!"* The Greek work means "Good news!" Great news, Fantastic news. Christmas is Good news.

We've been growing. The secret of our growth is not the pastors, not the "beautiful buildings" we worship in, it's certainly not the adequate parking. Our secret is **we've got Good News!** Great news! It's the best news in the world. People want to hear it. You'd have to lock the doors to keep people away from hearing Good News. This is it:

- God is crazy about you. The Creator of the universe cares about you personally. You are not an accident. God has a plan and a purpose for your life. Meaning and satisfaction come when I discover this.
- Christmas time is the time we most remember that God the Word became Flesh. It is mysterious. It is powerful. This isn't just a messenger, or a prophet. But God Himself.

Like the little boy who cried out to his daddy, "I'm afraid of the dark. Come in here and be with me." Dad said, "Just grab your teddy bear." The little boy said, "No, I want something with skin on it."

- *"I bring you good news and it is for everybody."* Everybody. I don't care what your religious background is or isn't. God did not come to give you religion. He came to give you a relationship. That's good news! Christmas is a time to release my fear, renew my faith.

This stall is the place to receive forgiveness.

Notice the third thing that the angel said, Luke 2:11 *"Today, in the town of David, a Savior has been born for you; he is Christ the Lord!"* God sent a Savior so we could receive forgiveness. Why? Because God doesn't grade on a curve. There's no sin or suffering or pain or sorrow in heaven. None of us measure up, and God doesn't grade on a curve. So instead, when the time was ripe, He sent His Son Jesus to live and die and rise again; to pay the penalty for our sin, if you put your faith in Him.

How do I let Christ save me? It's real simple. You admit you need a Savior. Admit you need help. And this transference occurs: He takes your sin, and you take on His righteousness: God sees you the way He sees His own Son. It's not about earning anything.

Johnny Cash was the bad guy on a Columbo rerun. The closing line, when he finally gets caught, says, "I'm glad I got caught because the guilt was killing me." A lot of you know what he means. God says, "I came to give you forgiveness."

This stall you're in is the place to rebuild relationships.

It's a time of reconciliations. Luke 2:14 *"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward all people."* God wants you to not only have peace with Him but He wants you to have peace with other people too. This week, no more stalling. Take some time and be present in their stalls. That means listening. Help them through their stall. None of us are here by accident. God brought you here for a purpose. He brought you here to say this to you, "Don't waste this Christmas. It's time."

Ultimately, this stall you're in is a time and place for you to meet Christ. How crazy to celebrate Christmas without even knowing the one we celebrate! It doesn't make sense. It's time for you to turn to

God. And the angels say "Glory to God". Glorifying God means making him famous. Imagine a group this large who accepted this good news and allowed God in to our stalls and then quit stalling in our fear, and faith, and forgiveness, and began building relationships in our homes, families, neighborhoods? Talk about making God famous! If you've never turned your stall over to God, or if you've been stalling, remember, the Good news: You don't have to "go" anywhere to begin. God has already come! Allow God into your stall, or you're stalled out life, and allow Him to change your life. Let Jesus Christ be your Savior. And think of what that could do

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for Christmas. Thank You even for the stall I've been in. Help me to lean on You. Thank You that it's time to release our fears and we do that. It's time to renew our faith and we do that. It's time to receive forgiveness and we do that. And it's time to rebuild relationships. Help us to do that.

(And if you've never invited Christ into your life, just say something like, "God, come into my life and make Yourself real to me. I want to know You. Forgive my sin. I put my faith in You. I ask You to be my Savior." In Jesus' name, Amen.