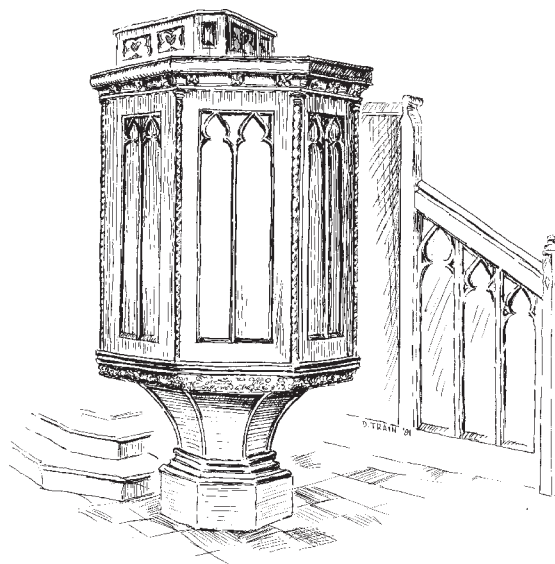


January 4, 2009

# Westminster Presbyterian Church

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## Sermons

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### ***Yes! We Get a "Do Over"***

By The Reverend Kay Davis-Dudding

Scripture: Matthew 26:17-19

Staff meetings occur at Westminster each Tuesday morning at nine o'clock, and it is no secret that it is not my favorite time of the week. First we gather as a full staff—sharing joys and concerns of our own and of the church. One of us is in charge of devotions, prayer and snacks. (We've *talked* about cutting out snacks, but I guess no one wants to believe it is a serious discussion.) We go over the calendar for the next two weeks and then go around the table at which time each person brings up church activities needing to be discussed. Occasionally, actually pretty often, one of us has had his or her turn, but thinks of something we forgot to bring up, or something that has just come to mind. This is where the "do over" comes in. As Program staff meetings can sometimes last until noon, "do overs" aren't really that popular, but they are permitted.

"Do over." There are other kinds of "do overs." Many of us would like to "do over" last year. The year 2008 was a downer in so many ways, and we pray things will change for ourselves, our church, our country, and the world.

According to an old saying, "Time heals all wounds." But, if you have found that not to be true—if it doesn't quite heal all of them, or doesn't heal them at all—at least time may present the opportunity to improve the quality of one's suffering, and I might suggest, that is sometimes more important than being free of the pain.

As we consider some of the more obvious culprits of recent months, some are suggesting that “time might also wound all heels.” We’re not going to go there, except perhaps to remind ourselves of Paul’s words regarding love—It rejoices *not* in the wrong.”

If we divide time into years, we can designate particular moments on which to reflect on the past, and to renew our hopes for the future. I want to do that by sharing some insights attributed to William Sloane Coffin, and I hope you will grant me some literary license to share some of our well-known Christmas story yet in a new way.

Let’s consider two people in the Christmas story who might have wished for a “do over.” King Herod, of course, is a real heel: deceiving the wise men, and later killing countless innocent babies and children. I can only hope he would consider a “do over” if he had the chance.

And what about the innkeeper, who, if he had been of a more generous nature, could easily have given up his *own* room to a woman about to have a baby? I know I would have. Now, I see the innkeeper, not as mean and uncaring, but as hassled—hassled by all the work he had to do—having so many guests in the inn. After all, the inn was booked to capacity. He was undoubtedly exhausted by the time Joseph’s knock woke him in the night. Tired beyond words, at least he didn’t tell Mary and Joseph to get lost. Instead he took the time to lead them to his stable. And I’d like to think he left them with a blanket.

With so many guests at his inn, the innkeeper took little time to concern himself about the family in the stable—even following the birth. And then, when the shepherds came (the innkeeper probably supposed them to be relatives as they were asking about the baby) the innkeeper was most likely glad the *family* was in the stable. Shepherds would have smelled up his inn. And then, the family in the stable left abruptly for Egypt—fleeing the authorities was what he had heard—and he was likely more than relieved that they *hadn’t* been guests in his inn.

I wonder whether or not the innkeeper ever realized what he had done, whom he had relegated to being lodged in the stable, and what an important turn in his life he had missed. Did he ever find out that the long awaited Messiah had been born out back, had come to him personally, and he had been too busy to recognize him?

Now, I like to think of the innkeeper, as prospering in the 30 years after that first Christmas, and that with his brother, opened a second inn in Bethlehem, and perhaps a third in Jericho. With the proceeds, he was able to own a house in the capital city of Jerusalem. And there, I picture him talking with a friend visiting from Galilee, who asks him if he has heard of Jesus of Nazareth, the one some claim to be the Messiah. The innkeeper says he has heard of Jesus, and is very impressed by all he has heard. Then the friend asks him very gently if he knows that 33 years ago that same Jesus had been born in the stable behind *his* very own inn.

“Oh, my God,” wails the innkeeper, remembering now not only the child, but also the star, the shepherds, and the wise men. The innkeeper was a devout man, and knew that while really tragic errors remain so, no mistake, or oversight has to remain pure tragedy, because nothing is beyond God’s forgiveness. The past is never beyond redemption. So, through his friend from Galilee, the innkeeper sends Jesus a message asking him to come to him a second time.

Hear again, the verse from the Gospel of Matthew.

*On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?" He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.'" So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover meal.*

I like to think that "a certain man" was the innkeeper; that Jesus and his disciples celebrated the Last Supper in the same place the innkeeper discovered his sad mistake. I picture the innkeeper, standing in the doorway, watching Jesus break and distribute the bread. And when he sees Jesus take the cup, and hears him say that his blood would be poured out for the forgiveness of many, the innkeeper sheds tears of gratitude. The Messiah could not relieve him of the consequences of his oversight, but could relieve him of the pain.

So, if we have "messed up" at some important time and have done something we should not have done, or not done something we should, and wished we could have a "do over," remember this story about the innkeeper. Nothing is beyond forgiveness; no past beyond redemption.

If you and I are here in this place in 2009, recalling that we have committed a sin of omission, or commission, and we hunger for God's assurance, then let us come to Christ's communion table this morning, and receive the Bread of Life, knowing that we have been forgiven—and that we too might have a "do over."

My friends, this morning as you receive communion, and throughout this New Year, commit as much of yourself as you can, to as much of God as you can—and have a happy and joy-filled 2009.