

Christmas Eve
St. Paul's/Resurrección, Mount Vernon, WA

December 24, 2020
Rev. Paul Moore

The Beloved Community

How can this be?

In "typical" years, which this is not, I usually put up a rather complex "Nacimiento" at our house. The stable is something the boys and I made many years ago, and the figurines are Fontanini. Our set comes with a wide variety of characters, including barn cats and lambs. I wonder what the first Christmas was like for the barn cat and the lamb?

Barn cat:

Every barn has a barn cat, right? We live in the stable. We keep the rodent population down. We take care of ourselves. We don't depend much on the humans, though a little milk in a dish is always welcome. We make our beds where we want to sleep, and we eat when we're hungry.

Last night, however, was something special. The human lady had a baby. Now, we barn cats have babies all the time, and it's no big deal, but this was a big deal. First of all, the lady only had one, not five. Second, there was a lot of scurrying around and bringing this and that, and other people here. And finally, when the baby was born, everybody thought it was something real special.

I didn't see anything special about it. It started crying right away, and the lady fed it right away, and then they wrapped it up in strips of cloth and laid it in the manger. Hay is good, but I would have preferred something more hidden away.

I don't know, maybe there is something special about this baby. I've never been this close to another human birth before, so I can't compare, but when the shepherds came bustling in with their dirty smelly sheep, all excited and talking in hushed voices, then they charge back out again and start shouting into the sleeping town about the Son of David being born...

Maybe there is something special about this child. Not that I would need the child for anything, but if he is something, I'd like to know. Who is this Son of David anyway? Is he like someone with a really big barn we could live in?

Lamb:

If every barn has a cat, every shepherd has a lamb. We live outside, mostly, though we sleep in a sheep-pen. The shepherds are always around, never far away, along with their

dog. We like to have the dog around, because sometimes there are wolves, and the dogs chase the wolves away. The shepherds take us to where there is good grass to eat, and then round us up again and take us back to the sheep-pen at night. I don't know how we would survive without the shepherd.

And then, the shepherds acted all un-shepherd-like last night. It really was glorious. You see, during lambing season, when new lambs are born, the shepherds spend the nights with us in the fields. We don't sleep in the sheep-pens. The watch to keep the wolves away. But last night suddenly the sky opened up with a brilliant light, and an angel spoke to the shepherds, and then lots of angels appeared singing beautiful music, and then the shepherds got all excited.

They are usually rather calm—it makes us feel safe when they are calm. But last night they weren't calm at all. It's funny, but I really didn't feel scared that they were excited, they were so happy. Then one of them scooped me up and carried me on his shoulders into town. There, in a stable, they found a man and a woman and a newborn child. They were so excited, that after talking for a while with the man, they ran into town and began calling out to the sleeping people in the town, “The Son of David is born!”

Who is this Son of David? Is he like a really good shepherd? I hope so.

Barn cats or Lambs. Some of us are barn cats. We're rather self-sufficient, really. We make enough money to live on, and we go about our business. God breaks in on us, and shakes up the world a bit, and leaves us wondering just who this Jesus child is.

Is he a great king? Yes, but not like you might think of a king.

Is he an important person? Yes, but not like important people in the world today.

Maybe he has a really big barn. Maybe being in relationship with Jesus puts us in community with a whole lot of other people we might not otherwise know. Maybe being involved with the Jesus Movement will expand our horizons of what it means to be the Beloved Community. Maybe we need him more than we first imagine.

Some of us are lambs. We know we're not OK on our own. We know we need help. We depend on certain people to make things OK for us, and hopefully, usually, they come through. And that's our life. But then God breaks in on us and shakes up the world a bit. The people we depend on don't quite act as expected, but somehow, it's OK. We wonder, who is this Jesus child?

Is he a great shepherd? Yes, but he doesn't replace your own shepherds.

Is he the owner of the sheep? Yes, but not like you would imagine.

Maybe he's the best shepherd ever. Maybe being in his fold will put us in contact with lots of other sheep from all over. Maybe being involved with the Jesus Movement will take us to ways of being the Beloved Community. Maybe we need him in ways we never imagined.

So, what are you? The independent, self-sufficient barn cat? Then I hope this night you get bumped just enough to make you look again. I hope God breaking in will upend you just enough to get you connected in ways you haven't been before.

Are you the faithful sheep? Then I hope this night you get pushed toward new and greener pastures. I hope God breaking in will get you rubbing shoulders with sheep you never imagined were part of the flock.

Either way, here comes Jesus. God is breaking in, and things won't quite be the same again.