

## THROUGH PEASANT EYES

December 24, 2005

Faith Community

It was late in the evening and we were just able to sit down to eat. We had been busy all evening bustling around, and hadn't noticed our hunger. Finally, it all ended and the house became quiet. It was then that we realized how hungry we were.

We quickly prepared some food, all of us together, and at last had the opportunity to relax and enjoy a meal. I had just reclined at the table, tired from a long day, and the rest of family was lying on cushions around the table, quiet and tired.

It had been a good night. The income from these past few nights would certainly help us financially, and we needed that. Finally, every room was full and we could rest. It was a good, tired feeling.

Then, all of a sudden there was a pounding at the door. I said, "Just ignore it. If we don't pay any attention they will go away." But then the pounding came again, this time stronger and louder. My son started to get up. I took his hand and repeated: "Just ignore it; they will go away after awhile." The pounding continued over and over again. It was obvious that they weren't going to give up.

### I

Finally, my wife couldn't take it anymore. She got up from her place at the table and went to open the door. Even as she opened it, she started explaining that we were full. There was no more room here.

But then she stopped mid-sentence. She called to me, "I think you better come here." I was comfortable on my couch. I said, "Just tell them to go away; we don't have any room, so there's nothing we can do for them."

She said, "I think...I think you better come here." I wondered what in the world could be going through her mind. What could she be thinking? She knew we were all tired, worn out, and hungry. But I also knew she wouldn't do this if there wasn't some good reason.

So I dragged myself up from my couch and walked to the door. "Look," I said. "I know you are in a difficult situation, and you need a place to stay, but there's nothing I can do for you. We don't have a single room left; we're packed."

It was then that I too noticed that the woman sitting on the donkey was very pregnant. "Yes, I see what your problem is," I said. "I really wish there was something I could do for you but I don't see any possibilities."

### II

Both the young man and his wife looked at me desperately. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see that my wife was giving me the same desperate look.

"OK, OK," I said. "Let me see if there's any possibility, any place. We can't double up in the rooms; that's not going to work with you being so pregnant."

“I’ll tell you what. The only thing I have is the stable out in the back. There’s some straw there; it’s not going to be comfortable, but at least it’s a roof over your head. It won’t smell very pleasant, and I’m not sure how warm it will be. It’s not really a decent place for any human being, and it’s certainly no place for a pregnant woman, but I guess it’s better than being stuck by the side of the road. Why don’t you come and take a look; see if you think it will do. I apologize but it’s really all that I have.”

We walked around to the back of the stable. My wife led the donkey with the pregnant woman on it. We got out some clean straw and spread it around on the floor.

I pulled out the manger - it still had wet slobber on it from the animals’ last feeding. I brushed it off, cleaned it up, and set it in the center of the stable. We started a little fire near the door to help them keep warm.

Then my wife went and got some blankets from the house and brought them to the couple. It wasn’t much to offer those poor people, but they seemed thankful even for that.

We fixed them up the best we could. Then my wife and I went back into our house to the dinner that was now stone cold. Somehow, after seeing those two young people, the cold meal didn’t taste bad.

### III

We finished eating and put things away and went to bed. We were awakened in the middle of the night by the crying of a newborn baby. That sound – I had almost forgotten the sound of the first cry of a new baby – brought back memories of our children when first born. How that purple-grayish body flushed to red with the first few gasps of breath as life came into the world.

I didn’t sleep much the rest of the night. I’m not sure what it was; the exhaustion of the day’s work and all the people, or, I suspect more likely, worrying about that little baby – if it was going to make it. I hoped that at least life would get easier for it from now on, after having such a tough beginning.

The next morning, when we went out to check on the family, we discovered that the baby was a boy. I gave them a little wood carving that I had done several years ago. It wasn’t really anything, but I wanted to give them some way to remember us.

A few weeks ago I told a friend about this experience with the young man and woman, and their baby in the stable. Do you know what he said to me when I was finished telling the story? I couldn’t believe it. He said, “How much did you charge them for the night?”

Can you imagine? All he could think about was how much money did you get out of it? Well, I’ll tell you, money did not occur to me until my friend asked me that question. And of course, I didn’t charge them one denarius.

### IV

There have been lots of times since that night when my place has been full, every room filled except one. Since that couple was there that night, I have always kept one room available.

I keep it for some helpless, poor couple that needs a place to stay. I do it because I'm never going to have anybody stay in my stable again. I felt so bad; I worried about that baby – I'm not going to have that again. That one room is reserved for those who are poor, lonely, struggling, and maybe even pregnant. It's set aside for desperate people.

When I let poor people use that room, I don't charge them for it, of course. That little family made an impression on me that night. I figure maybe in some small, obscure way, when I let somebody use that room for free, I'm doing it for that young woman and her husband and their new baby boy.

I think of that little family often. I wonder whatever became of them. I wonder if that little boy ever made it. Was he a success? Was he a failure? I wonder if life got better for him after such a rough beginning. Sometimes I wonder what happened to them. I wonder how it all turned out.

Amen.