



Monday, December 10th marked Human Rights Day, the commemoration of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, which pledges that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” It was also the 50th anniversary of the death of Thomas Merton, monk, poet, and human rights activist. Merton’s legacy taken up on Monday by nearly [1000 people of faith](#) who marched along the shore of Border Field State Park to the US/ Mexico border crossing proclaiming “Love Has No Borders.” If he were alive today, Merton would have been there at the front of the march with our Unitarian Universalist Association president Rev. Susan Frederick Gray, crossing the barbed wire and kneeling in prayer in front of the border patrol. He would have joined clergy in our message to our government to enforce a different kind of law – the universal human right “to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.” He would have contested the negligent and inhumane conditions which migrants are subjected to at the border, conditions which caused the death of seven year old Guatemalan migrant [Jakelin Caal](#), who died in border patrol custody on Friday. This morning, I want to share Merton’s words with you, which call us to reflect on the Christmas story in a time of “no room.” He writes: (adapted)

We live in the time of no room.

The time when everyone is obsessed with lack of time, lack of space, with saving time, conquering space, projecting into time and space the anguish produced within them by technological furies.

There is no room for nature.

There is no room for quiet.

There is no room for solitude.

There is no room for thought.

There is no room for attention, for the awareness of our state.

There is no space to rest in the human heart, not because it is full, but because it is void.

There is no room for belief.

Into this world, in this demented inn in which there is absolutely no room for him at all, Jesus has come uninvited.

But because he cannot be at home in it –

because he is out of place in it, and yet must be in it –

his place is with those others who do not belong,

who are rejected, those who are discredited, and those who are denied the status of persons.

With those for whom there is no room, the story of Jesus is present.

What does it mean to celebrate Christmas in a time of “no room?” Merton’s words, written over 50 years ago, still ring powerfully true for us today. Perhaps the truth is we have always been living in a time of “no room.” At Christmas, I think we become acutely aware of this reality in our own time.

We see all around us our modern reality of “no room” – with our over-scheduled lives, we are tightly wound around our work and the labor to sustain our daily needs. There is little space for spontaneity, and the joy that comes with unscheduled time. Technology, while it connects us, has also created a sense of “no room” for deep connection when we are constantly looking at our phones. And all around us, we see evidence of people for whom there is “no room.” We see our neighbors living in tents under the freeway, as California grapples with the largest unhoused population in the nation. We know that homelessness especially impacts elders and teens, and especially those who are lesbian, gay, and transgender, many of whom have been told by their religion or their families of origin that there is no room for them. On the news we see have seen images of the global

refugee crisis, which is now not far away at all, but just over the border in Tijuana, where over 7,000 people have been encamped in the most dangerous part of town. Our government continues to dehumanize these migrants and restrict them from exercising their right to seek asylum—we hear over and over again the message—no room—no room—no room.

But as with the Christmas story, this state of “no room,” is simply not the end of the story. In fact, it is just the beginning. The time of no room is precisely the right time. The time of no room is a time which beyond all odds, hope is born and love is made manifest, not in the form of a triumphant miracle on high, but in the everyday miracles of ordinary people making room where there is no room-- caring for one another in the most dire and inhospitable of circumstances.

I know many of us in this congregation have been gravely concerned over the deepening humanitarian crisis at the US/ Mexico border. Over the past few weeks, I've reached out to dozens of organizers, artists, lawyers and people of faith to explore how our congregation could become more involved. We first learned that a need that has been largely unfulfilled was for sturdy shoes and warm socks. After walking 2,500 miles and landing in a squalid, muddy camp, I can't imagine how good it would feel to put on a new pair of shoes. Last week you made room in your closets and found nearly 100 pairs of shoes to donate to our partner, the Ambos project, which is an artist collective based on both sides of the border. This morning, our box is overflowing with generous donations. Thank you thank you!

You are joining the ordinary people with already full lives and full plates who have been moved to making room in their lives to help. I want to tell you about the work of one of those people, Mark Lane, of the Minority Humanitarian Foundation. The mission of Minority Humanitarian Foundation is to provide a humanitarian response to the issues facing immigrants and refugees on a global scale. MFH believes that all humans should be treated with dignity and respect, despite country of origin. Mark has been immersed in helping migrant families find safe harbor after making their journeys across the border. Mark is a part of a rapid response network of people who have been literally making room in their own homes. His focus has been on helping sponsor families with children with disabilities or other health care needs, women facing intimate partner violence and LGBT people. People like Juan Alberto Matthew and his 7-year-old daughter, Lesly, who had run out of the medication used to treat her cerebral palsy, and 15 year old Javi, who has down syndrome, and his mom who believed that another life could be possible for Javi.

Mark shared a story about 40 transgender women who had rocks thrown at them on American soil at a temporary shelter, and of the one volunteer who purchased two months of hotel rooms for these women to give them a safer landing place. He described one volunteer who had people living in every bed room and back house, and his own plans to move to a bigger house to be able to help more people. Some of Mark's words to live by: "No one is where they are at because of their own efforts. Someone helped you, somewhere in some stage of your life."

Mark and I talked about how we might be able to help support a family up here in Pasadena. Weeks ago, I was asked to consider helping woman named Rosa and her four young children under the age of 10. Fleeing a terrible domestic violence situation, Rosa and her family have persevered over an unbelievably arduous journey, as of last night are free from detention here on American soil. Last night, Mark was out picking up a massive donation of diapers which he will deliver to the Caritas shelter. He scurried around to find the right car seats for four young children to ride safely in a car. And then he picked up Rosa and her family. Today, he will drive them up to Pasadena and I will meet them for the first time. Into an already full time of my life, and our ministry, this family has arrived. We are being asked to make room in our lives to help. This family will need everything as Rosa begins the asylum seeking process-- shelter, food, clothing, emotional and legal support.

How might our church make room in our community for Rosa and her family? Already, our congregation has stepped up to provide housing, medical care, and to support the family's daily needs. We will explore this together with our partners in the coming weeks. I have faith that we can respond with love and compassion.

Christmas is our time of spiritual rebirth, where we rekindle the values which we uphold and strive to sustain in our daily lives but often forget. Generosity, in other seasons, can be eclipsed by fear and lack. At Christmas we revel in how good it feels to give to others and to share what we have. Forgiveness, which in other seasons can be elusive, comes easier as we set aside old grudges and have the faith to trust in one another anew. We return to a kind of childlike innocence, allowing ourselves to be delighted by the sights, tastes and sounds of the season and to dream of peace.

In the darkest days of December, there is a clearing in our hearts, and the lighting of a clarifying fire of compassion which burns off cynicism and despair. That space is not meant to be filled with gifts and goodies, but to be held open, to respond to the deep need of the world with genuine and unguarded caring. There in our hearts is where we must make room for Christmas. Let us take deep breaths in, and expand that space of our hearts.

Making room for hope
Making room for faith
Making room for joy
Making room for love.
May it be so, and amen.