Have you ever thought about why it is important to have a particular place to worship God? God can be worshipped anywhere, so why work so hard to create a particular place to worship God?

A few days before Thanksgiving, Jose Moran pulled the manger from storage and placed it in the chancel of Holy Jesus Child Church in Queens, New York. Jose is the custodian of the church. Before bringing out Mary and Joseph and wise men, Jose went to lunch. Upon his return, he heard something in the sanctuary. He stepped in to discover a newborn, no more than four to five hours old. This little boy was just coming into the world, and someone had left him alone, in the manger of the Holy Jesus Child Church in Queens. He was there, depending on love to save him.

The truth is, the time comes for all of us when we are depending on love to save us.

Irony aside ... leaving a child in a manger ... that’s no place for a baby. Every baby needs a place in this world. Every baby needs a place to belong.

Joseph and Mary traveled to Bethlehem. It’s where Joseph’s family was from. The trip back to the old home place was a required journey. Pregnant or not, Mary had to go. It was while they were there that Jesus was born.

Mary — exhausted and filled with wonder, overjoyed and scared to death — does what mothers do. She wraps him up tight. Babies like that.

She had no bed, no cradle handmade by an excited grandfather. They were traveling and dependent on the hospitality of this world, which was limited. There was no room for them in the inn, the Bible says, so she laid him in a manger. You have known that part of the story since you were a kid.

When there was no place, Mary made a place for this child, because every baby needs a place. Every baby needs a place to belong.

But it’s not just babies; everyone needs a place to belong.

It was reported that a plane loaded with Syrian refugees landed in Canada this week. Prime Minister Trudeau of Canada was reported to have said to them, “Welcome home!” The irony of it struck me. Canada is a place we assume they have never ever been. Can that be home?

What I know is everybody needs a place. We all need a place to belong. That was true for Jesus as well. There was no place in the inn, so Mary made a place in the manger.

Sometimes, when the world doesn’t have room, we have to make a place where the love of God can breathe. That’s why it’s important that we have this room. Because the time comes when all of us need to be saved by love, and this sanctuary will be a place where the love of God can breathe.
We have spent a lot of time on acoustics. We have spent more time than you thought possible determining the best way to build this ceiling. It’s not just beautiful, but it helps you hear.

We have spent a lot of time working to design the organ that is coming soon.

We have spent a lot of time on HVAC because we want you to be comfortable.

And there’s a screen up there, hidden in this ceiling.

I hope you like the paint color. If you do, it was my idea; but if you don’t, I was as surprised to see it as you were.

But all those details serve a greater purpose. We have done all of this because worship matters.

It is our prayer and intent that this room — this room that we have worked together to create — will be a manger; a place where the love of God lives; where the love of God is spoken; where the love of God shapes us; where the love God is known and trusted; where God’s holy love saves us.

It will happen right there at that font. Parents will bring their little ones. Like Mary herself, they will be exhausted and filled with wonder; they will be overjoyed and scared to death. They will want to believe that there is a place in this world that their sons and daughters can belong, and this will be just such a place.

It will happen at that table — when we taste ordinary bread because that’s what it is; and we share the body of Christ because that’s what it is. We will commune not only with each other, but with all the saints. All those who have gone before will meet us at this table because the whole body of Christ gathers here, and it can’t be the Lord’s Supper if any are left out. There will always be a place for you at this table.

It will happen when this choir gathers in front of us to sing resurrection. It will happen on Easter morning when joy fills these pews. And it will happen in ordinary time when grief fills these pews — and our joy is an act of defiance and stained with the salt of our tears. But we will sing because we know that love will save us.

It will happen when we mourn not for ourselves, but for this beautiful but broken world. You will bring with you the hurt of the world because some tsunami or tornado has destroyed; or because someone with an army or a gun or a bomb has destroyed. And you will bring all of that into this place — not because we have the answers, but because this is the best place to be when life falls apart. We will come and remember again that word that stands forever.

It will happen in those old familiar pews, as we sit with friends old and new, and there, in our friendships, discover the love that carries us through the storm.

Like a manger, this place makes room for the love of God in a world that has very little room for such things. Because this is a place where the love of God lives; this is a place where you belong — always.

Jose Moran called Rev. Christopher Heanue, who was just ordained this past summer. Jose said, “I don’t think it’s Jesus, but there is a baby boy in the manger.”

Most in the city said, “That’s no place for a baby.” I get that.

But Rev. Heanue said, “This is the perfect place — because the church is a home for those in need.” I think he is right.

So again, welcome home, Village family. This is home for the confident and the searching.

This sanctuary, like a manger, is a place where
you rest in the love that will save you.

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This sermon was delivered at Village Presbyterian Church, 6641 Mission Road, Prairie Village, KS 66208.

The sermon can be read, heard or seen on the church’s Web site: www.villagepres.org/sermons.