

“Our Fragile Hope”

Luke 2: 1; 3 – 7

Rev. Wayne E. Gustafson, D.Min.

Christmas Eve – December 24, 2009

Throughout this Advent Season, we have been talking about the process of preparing for the coming of the Christ-child into a troubled world. The poetic quality of the image of this small child – this fragile savior – appearing as a tiny light into a very dark world is stunning in its beauty and its truth.

How can anything be so fragile on the one hand, and be so tenacious and so powerful on the other? When we stop to think about it, we realize that all life shares that paradoxical condition – fragile, yet tenacious. I have seen much evidence for this paradox in my life and I assume you have, too. I have seen bodies ravaged by disease, trauma, poverty and hunger that seem to hold onto life as if with the jaws of a pit bull. Many people even recover from such ravages. So many times have I seen health flourish in the same place where it seemed that death would have the final say.

Then too, I have seen ostensibly healthy lives snuffed out in an instant through disease or accident. How all life can be so tenacious and so fragile at the same moment overwhelms my reason – but I know it truly represents the reality of this earthly existence.

We are here to celebrate the birth of a baby – one who is born, not in a sterile and safe hospital – but in the shed out in the back, behind the inn. This baby does not have the benefit of protection by masks or glass or modern medicine. This baby – our fragile savior – sleeps in the trough where just a short time before, the animals had been eating.

The Christ-child who is born into our lives today suffers under conditions that are perhaps even more perilous. Our Christ-child might be suffocated by the pressures of commercialism and financial debt.

Our Christ-child might be abandoned because we are too busy to attend to such religious trivia. Our Christ-child might be disenfranchised by rampant cultural greed. Our Christ-child might be disfigured, scarred for life, by those who would take him onto the battlefield of hatred and fear, who insist on placing in his mouth the words of revenge and destruction.

It is not clear at this moment in time if our Christ-child can survive. Our troubled times seem to portend his annihilation.

Still... still, we come here on this night. We sing the songs of his birth. We tell the story of his coming. We try to remember why the angels sang in the heavens, why the shepherds left their flocks to follow a strange light, why the Wise Men came to the stable from a far land. We shed tears of gratitude for families who have gathered together. And some of our tears are bittersweet for the memories of those who are no longer with us to celebrate this Christmas.

We come here to rekindle our hope – that the transforming reality of the Christ-child can not only survive in us, but can withstand the ever-present perils of pain, loss, cynicism, and distraction. We come here praying that the spirit of love, healing, and relationship will save us.

I pray that we can remember the tenacity of life and love, even in the midst of our challenges and difficulties. I pray that we can tend lovingly to the spirit of the Christ-child as it grows in us.

This fragile savior brings us a fragile but significant hope. I invite you to receive this gift. Love it; nurture it; and supported by this hope, live your lives tenaciously. All of life needs you to do that.

May you find the Christmas blessings that you need.