

There's a story I share with my congregation down in Lutsen pretty much every chance I get that I'm reminded of now that we're in the Season of Advent. It goes like this. A kindergarten teacher was watching her classroom of five-year-olds as they were drawing pictures. And as she walked past a young girl who was feverishly scribbling with a crayon, she bent down to ask what she was drawing. The little girl replied, 'I'm drawing God.' The teacher frowned and said, 'But dear, you know that no one knows what God looks like.' Without even looking up the girl replied, 'Well, they will in a minute!'

If there's one thing all of us gathered here tonight share in common, it's that we know what God looks like because we've experienced the image of the divine in the faces and the voices and the touch of loved ones. It doesn't matter whether one is Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Native Spiritualist, or perhaps agnostic or atheist. It's love that takes us to that place where we understand that we're connected to one another in ways that transcend the years we spend together.

There's a saying in the Jesuit tradition that 'We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are instead spiritual beings having a human experience.' And that may well be the tie that binds us to one another as we light candles and remember our loved ones. The prophet Isaiah reminds us that we are fashioned like clay pots. We're made of dust forged in ancient stars and knit together in our mother's womb. But as we all know, over the years clay pots begin to crack and to chip and to fail. Our bodies are made so that they won't last forever. But like clay vessels, we are created to be used while we are here. We're created to be filled up and emptied again and again as we share our lives with those around us.

We are placed on this earth to love, to give, to explore, and to create with every breath we take. All the memories we've shared, all the hardships we've endured, all the joys we've celebrated, all the emotions we've invested are but a part of the journey. This is the human part ... and it's so amazing and so filled with laughter and adventure and intimacy that we grieve when it's over.

But we remember tonight that the spiritual part of our pilgrimage is eternal. The love we celebrate is bigger than any one of us. It connects us to family and community. It draws us closer when the world feels as if it's falling apart. It bridges the chasm between life and death. The creator of this vast and timeless universe is right here with us this evening as we light candles and pour out our hearts. God is listening as we ask the difficult questions that can at times feel overwhelming. Questions like, 'Where does our love go when a parent or spouse or child or partner is gone?' 'Where is the promise of resurrection in a world where death always seems to have the final say?'

The answers to these heartfelt questions are found in a word that we use all the time, but that we perhaps don't really grasp the full meaning of until we're gathered like this. That word is ... grace. Grace is a love that has no boundaries. It's a love that cannot be stolen away. It's a love that's shared with us regardless of our religious beliefs, our politics, our sexuality, or our history. God just loves ... and out of this love ... God walks beside us each day of our pilgrimage on this earth and is nearest to us on nights like tonight. And so we're invited this evening to gently turn our faces toward the direction from which the light will come because we sense that God's love for us isn't diminished by our losses or our tears or the passage of time.

God's love transcends the generations. It cuts through the darkness when we're blinded by our brokenness. It's a love that calms the waves when we're tossed about by the chaos and the uncertainty of this life. It's a love that reaches all the way down into this hectic and uncertain world and says 'peace ... be still.'

Grace and Peace,
Pastor Tom