

January 6, 2012

Dear Friends,

"I first met Jean when she was almost six weeks old. I did not see her at her best. She had beautiful dark eyes which seemed like peaceful islands within the anxious grimace of her face. She ran through all the rooms of the house, uncovering all the beds she could find, as if she was looking for something. The objects of this search proved to be the pillows, which she hugged and talked to in a whisper and a laugh" (Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 1963, pp. 195-196).

This little girl had some very special problems. Her mother explained that many of them developed soon after she was diagnosed with tuberculosis. Tuberculosis is a contagious respiratory disease. It can spread to other people through coughs and sneezes.

Jean's mother was bedridden with tuberculosis. "She was permitted to stay at home in her own room, but the child could speak to her only through the doorway of her bedroom, from the arms of a good-natured but tough nurse. During this period the mother had the impression that there were things which the child urgently wanted to tell her" By the time the child was permitted to re-enter her mother's room, she spoke only in a whisper and cried all the time. (p. 196).

The story is retold every Christmas how God came down from heaven and was born a babe in Bethlehem. God wants to be loved by us and there was no greater way of making the point than to appear as an infant. All babies desire to be held and loved by us.

Jesus spoke of two roads in the Bible. One road is broad and many follow it. "The gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction" (Matthew 7:13) could very well refer to the preference many people have to relate to God in terms of "fire and brimstone." It is an idiomatic expression of God's wrath in the Bible. Fire and brimstone awaits all those who are unfaithful.

The other road is narrow, but it's the one that Jesus recommends. It's the way of love. God already spoke to us through thunder and cloud on Mt Sinai. God spoke to Moses through fire in the burning bush. He had the attention of the Egyptians when he sent them ten plagues and the Israelites when he afflicted them with drought and famine. If all this worked, Jesus would not have had to die for us on the cross.

I see Jesus like that little girl who wants nothing more than to be held in her mother's arms. Without her mother's love she cries and becomes fearful. She satisfies herself with talking to all the pillows because that's what she sees her mother's head lying on.

Like Jean, Jesus is also at our door (Rev. 3: 20). The road to Jesus is through love. It is what he desires. Only servants respond to fear. We are his friends (John 15: 15). We are his brothers and sisters.