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Love That Saves
John 1
Christmas Eve 2013

Recently I reread the book *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeline L'Engle. As I read fantasy/science fiction books, I'm always interested in what saves, and in this book, similar to the Harry Potter series, what saves is love. If you aren't familiar with *A Wrinkle in Time* it's about three children, Charles Wallace Murray, Meg Murray, and their friend Calvin O'Keefe. The three children set off on an intergalactic quest to find Meg and Charles Wallace's father, Mr. Murray. The children aren't alone on their journey, interestingly they have three stars to guide them. When the stars are in human form they are called Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who, and Mrs. Which.

By a technique known as wrinkling, the children, with the help of the stars, are able to travel away from earth to other planets to search for Mr. Murray, who also figured out how to wrinkle and that's what got him into trouble. On the planet of Camazotz, where Mr. Murray is held prisoner, there's a scene where the children are facing the evil IT, a brain that hypnotizes the whole planet, demanding complete uniformity in all things. As the children confront IT, Charles Wallace starts to lose himself to this evil. The boy known as Charles Wallace is disappearing. IT, the big brain of the whole planet begins to speak through Charles Wallace. Meg and Calvin try to reason with Charles Wallace but to no avail. Calvin then says this, "Hush Meg, there's no use trying to talk to him," "What we have to do is hold Charles Wallace tight. He's there, somewhere, underneath, and we mustn't let them take him away from us. Help me hold him, Meg. Don't lose control of yourself. Not now. You've got to help me hold Charles!"

This scene in the book reminds me of advice I was given in a parenting class where the psychologist leading the class instructed not to send children off to their rooms alone or into time out when they were acting inappropriately, but to sit with them, to hold them, to communicate without words that you would never abandon them, to communicate without words that you would always love them, no matter what. I remember this advice sometimes.

The scene in the book reminded me of a story I heard when I was visiting Trinity UCC in Chicago, of women going into the hospitals, finding the babies of mother who struggled with drug addiction, and the women sat and held those babies.

Christmas is about God holding the world. Christmas is about God never giving up on the world and entering into the world. Tonight we celebrate a child who is a sign to us that surprisingly powerful divine love is being born into our world all the time.

The stories we are telling from Holy Scripture tonight are stories that come from a people who felt abandoned. Ancient Israel was afraid that God had abandoned them. They were afraid that because they had misbehaved as a people in the past, and in the present, because they had not followed the commandments, that God had turned God's back on them. This was why life was so hard and everything was going so wrong in their world. They were afraid that God was gone.

In the present, two thousand years later, we often ask essentially the same question: Is God is still here? Does this ancient God still fit into our modern world or has science pushed this God aside? Has God's territory been reduced to what happens after death? Is God only concerned with the soul, which means that God has nothing to do with our bodies, with the nitty gritty of life in the present, and how we live with one another in our communities and around the world. We ask if there is sacred power that moves in our world. We ask if there is sacred power that moves in our lives. We want to know if there is goodness, right here, in our world that is greater than all that does us harm. We want to know if there is goodness for us in our hurt, right now: goodness that is not just strong enough to dull the pain, but sacred power that is strong enough to transform our pain.

And the response from the scriptures that we read tonight is “Yes!” Yes, God is still here and Jesus, Emmanuel is a sign to us. Yes, there is goodness out there for us. God is love and God’s love is strong, stronger than we think. There is a sacred dimension to love that we often overlook. That means that this love has the power not just to dull our pain but to transform it. This love is what is ultimate in the universe and this divine love made flesh has something to say to us about the present, about the nitty gritty of life, about how we treat one another in relationship and in our communities and in our nation and in the world. Yes divine love is here and it is connected to everything. We can’t get rid of it. The child is the sign to us.

At the beginning of the service we read from the beginning of the Gospel of John, the words we speak of as the incarnation: the Word, Jesus became flesh and lived among us. The incarnation is helpful for me because it helps me see a different world. I’m not interested in getting lost in questions of what happened. The gospel writers have different opinions on what happened and we can have different opinions too. I am interested in what helps us. For me, the incarnation is a helpful response to this question about abandonment. Has God abandoned the world? No, God loves the world. God holds the world so tightly that the world will never get away. No matter what we do, no matter what others do, God will always be with us. The incarnation is like an anchor holding God and the world together. But the incarnation is more than that. It’s like a window showing us that the world is swiss cheese, and God is coming in through all the tunnels. The world is like a sponge, always soaking up divine love, you can’t possibly wring all that love out. When I see God made flesh in Jesus, in this child, in this life, that then becomes the life of the church, I start to see God made flesh all over the place. I start to see the world differently, and that changes me. Then I start to believe, that when we are walking in the deepest night, a light will still shine. I start to believe there’s no way that light will go out.

We are invited to see the world this way: a world that is all wrapped up in God’s overwhelming unconditional embrace. We are to see ourselves as living in a porous world, and God, divine love, love with a sacred dimension, is coming through it and through us all the time. As we look for sacred love in small, unexpected, humble places, we will see it. And we will begin to believe that this love will never

leave us, that this love has the power to transform us, that this love has the power to save us. Christ is born. We see that God is with us in the world. This is good news. Amen.