

Once there was a Child -- Frank Fisher, Interim Pastor of 1st Presbyterian - Watseka, IL

Once there was a Child. A Child, who was a special Child indeed. A special Child, who loved to do many special things. But out of all the special things this special Child loved to do, there was nothing more special than the time the Child spent working in the workshop. That's not too surprising, because this was no ordinary workshop. Only wondrous things were ever made in it.

Every day the Child's Parent, the Master Worker, would walk to the work bench and wave to the Child to come help. Trembling with anticipation, the Child would place those little hands on the tools and let the Worker's big hands guide the tools across the wood on the bench. Shavings and saw dust would fill the air as shapes began to form under their joined fingers. Then as the shapes became more defined the Child would gasp with wonder. For the tools produced things like planets and stars that the Worker flung joyfully into the heavens. And things like flowing oceans, and towering mountains that the Worker placed precisely on the planets. But the most marvelous part of all came when the Worker guided the Child's hands to make the shapes of creatures. The Child thought the creatures were beautiful. And they became even more beautiful when the worker blew gently into their mouths, giving to them the precious gift of life. The Child loved those creatures most of all. Especially the creatures the Worker named human beings. For the Child and the Worker made human beings in the Worker's image. And to them the Worker gave a special breath. A life giving breath which meant they would one day come back to the workshop and live there forever. The Worker's face always crinkled with a smile at the depth of the Child's love for humans. But one day there came a moment when the smile faded. The Worker knew it was time for one of those serious talks with the Child.

"My Child," the Worker said, "I have a task you must do alone. A task you must do to carry on our creation of human beings. I want you to go away from the workshop for awhile. I want you to go, and live among these people whom you love so much. Go to them. Show and tell them how very, very, very

much We love them."

The Child smiled and immediately nodded yes. But the Worker cautioned, "This will be painful and fear filled work my Child."

Then turning to the bench the Worker said, "I have one gift for you before you go. A gift to show you just how fearful this task will be."

Again the wood chips and saw dust filled the air. This time when the dust cleared, the worker turned and handed the Child a cup.

"Look into the cup," the Worker said, "and you will see all the things you must drink to show humans the depths of our love."

Peering into the cup, the Child burst out laughing with delight. For in it was a bubbling, leaping, and dancing drink that looked like the finest wine. The Child could tell it was made up of joy, and faith, and it was saturated with the Worker's love.

"Why should I fear this drink," the Child said to the Worker?

The Worker looked gently at the Child and replied, "Look again my Child."

Somewhat puzzled the Child looked again into the cup and saw another mixture. Again it seemed a marvellous drink. This time it looked as smooth as the purest cream. In it, the Child saw healing, peace, and salvation, mixed liberally with an endless measure of the Worker's grace.

The Child looked up at the Worker again and said more strongly, "Why should I fear this drink either?"

With eyes filled with tears, the Worker said, "Look into the cup one more time."

The Child looked into the depths of the cup and gasped. It almost slipped from that little hand as the

Child screamed, "No! Please take this away. I can't drink this."

For this time the mixture in the cup boiled and stank. As the Child watched in fear the liquid in the cup appeared to come alive. It seemed to reach outward toward the Child with evil fingers. And as the fingers reached out the Child saw the cup was filled with a fear that could never be imagined. For the liquid in it was made up of every possible evil, every possible sin, and every possible pain. And it was mixed together with countless streams of eternal death.

Turning toward the Worker the Child gasped out, "Why? How could you ask me to do this. Why must I drink this cup?"

With a look of sadness, the Worker looked steadily into the Child's eyes and replied, "You may choose not to drink this cup. But if that's your choice the human beings you love will drink it. They will swim in its pain, and they will be swallowed up by its sin and evil. If you do not drink it they will die. And it will be a forever death. They will never come back here. They will never share this workshop with us again."

The Child sighed and turned toward the Worker. And with eyes shining with love said, "I can't do that. I care too much for them. I could never let my people drink this cup." And reaching out toward the Master Worker the Child cried out, "Hold my hand, please. I will drink it for them." Then the Child lifted the evil cup toward those Childish lips and instantly was in another place.

Instead of being in the workshop, the Child was in a cradle which was surrounded by animals. And looking down at the Child's face were two of those people the Child, and the Worker, loved so much. There was a woman named Mary, and a man named Joseph. And in Child's ears sounded a wondrous song. For in the sky above, angels danced and twirled as they sang songs of joy at the incredible news of the Child's special love.

The love that forever snatched from our lips the cup of sin, and eternal death. The love that appeared

when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us in the quiet place named Bethlehem. May all glory and eternal thanks be given to God. Amen.