



ST. ANDREW'S IN THE PINES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

SERMON
Christmas Eve, 2014

I've been thinking a lot about swaddling clothes this past month. You know – “and she gave birth to her first born son and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger.” Only some translations now say bands of cloth – which leaves me puzzling as much over bands of cloth as I used to puzzle over what swaddling clothes were. But you see, now I am a grandmother of three little ones under the age of three and I found and purchased swaddling blankets for those dear babies. And I found other sleeping garments called swaddling bags that I could have bought. So I now I know that swaddling clothes are for wrapping up a baby all tight and secure. Their little arms and legs are tucked in and they are snuggled into this cloth that keeps them warm and comfortable and they can sleep in peaceful slumber. That's what they did to baby Jesus. That's what our children did to their babies – wrapped them in swaddling clothes and laid them in their beds. Apparently it's what babies want – to be swaddled.

This year we spent Thanksgiving at my parent's home in Cody. Three of our four children, their spouses and all five of our grandchildren were there. There were 15 of us and it was a wonderful couple of days. As I've said, three of the grandchildren are almost two and almost three years of age. They each have favorite blankets. For Jesco and Frankie, their blankets are very serious business. Jesco's blanket is huge and called Da and Frankie will call hers da also. Both kids will drag their blankets with them into a room, view the people gathered, and choose one of us to climb into the lap and snuggle into their blanket. Most often this person was grandpa – or dada. If there is any stress or disturbance in their lives, the tears and cries are to have Da. If it is time for bed, they must have da. Da wraps around them and makes their world better. Da is their swaddling cloth.

There was something else I watched over the Thanksgiving visit that deeply touched my heart. It was watching our oldest son Tad be a parent with Jesco and Frankie. Although many of us were graced with getting to hold those two in our laps – when daddy walked in the room life improved dramatically. Daddy, my Daddy they say and immediately run to their father. If Tad was gone for too long they would wander the house asking, “Where'd my daddy go?” Where's my daddy?” The love, the closeness, the delight they had being with their daddy filled me with wonder. Who would have thought that our first born son, the dear baby that we figured out parenting upon, would someday be such a beloved father - a father who scoops up his children and holds them close and makes their world perfect? With da wrapped around them and snuggled into their father's arms, all was well, all was the best.

But it's not just babies that like to be swaddled, is it? I know an adult that will get into bed and somehow tuck the blankets and sheets all around their body until they lie there a bit like a mummy, tightly bound. Or just the other day I heard the story of a high school daughter who climbed into her mother's arms while she sat in an easy chair and together the two took an impromptu nap, because life was warm and secure. There are afghans and hugs and holding arms and blankets that hold us close and in them we seek safety and comfort. We want to rest in peace and love.

So that's what I've been thinking about this past month. That little, newly born Jesus came into this world and was wrapped in swaddling clothes. There were parents there who held him and made him feel warm and secure and let him sleep comfortably and in peace. Jesus got to start out life on earth being swaddled. And I hope there were loving arms and secure places for him as he grew. And then He began to swaddle others. It was the passing on of the gift he received at birth.

Just like watching our son Tad, the baby John and I once swaddled, now wrapping up and holding close his own children, Jesus did the same. The generations continue, the caring continues, the loving arms continue.

We start out this night remembering a baby, a newborn baby wrapped securely in bands of cloth and lovingly laid in a bed to rest, lovingly nurtured to grow, kept safe and cared for when his entire life depends on the care of others- when there is nothing Jesus can do on his own to keep himself alive. His life is swaddled in the love of his parents.

And in that love he grows, and with that love he turns to swaddle each of us at any moment when we need loving, safe, caring arms around us. It makes such sense to me now. That little swaddled baby grows to swaddle others. It's the gift that is passed on. It is the way to have life, life with love in it, life with peace and security, life with eternal arms wrapped around us.

I've always liked the very last line of the book of Matthew when Jesus says, "And lo, I am with you always, to the end of the age." I am with you always to the end of the age. And now I imagine Jesus with me wrapping bands of swaddling around me -bands of warmth, bands of love, bands of security, bands of comfort, bands of care, bands that will hold me in safety for all of my life.

Jesus was swaddled. Now He swaddles us – forever.

Thanks be to God.