

December 18, 1983

This morning, just before meeting-for-worship, a member of our group told me about one of her co-workers who was senselessly murdered last Friday morning. She also spoke of the victims of the AIDS disease whom she serves in the hospital where she works, and whose lives seem so meaninglessly cut off in their prime. All this seems so contradictory to the spirit of this Season, which we mainly think of as a celebration of hope and abundance.

This morning's conversation reminded me of a television interview with the presidential candidate, Reverend Jessie Jackson, which I saw a few days ago. In the blunt way that television commentators can adopt, the anchor man asked Reverend Jackson if he ever thought about Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, and about the untimely ends they met in the course of their idealistic ventures. Reverend Jackson was not fazed in the least, but looked the commentator right in the eye and said that death is the only certainty that we know. Everyone goes around acting as if life is certain, he went on to say, but this is an illusion—only death is certain. But the fact that life is fragile does not mean that we have any excuse for folding up our tents and hibernating while there is great work to be done.

It seems that here, in the Reverend Jackson's remarks, we see the connection between the tragedies mentioned this morning and the spirit of this Season. We take life for granted, as if it was something we deserved, or even earned, when in reality each day is given to us as a gift, as if from nowhere. How do we treat this gift? Often with a sense of distracted hurry, or even contempt. And how much is given to us, in addition to the very life breaths which keep us going! What unpatented inventor designed the bow knot with which we keep our shoes on our feet. And who invented the making of thread and the cross weaving of the fabrics with which we protect ourselves? Indeed, how many millions of Johnny Appleseeds have sown seeds so that we might enjoy fruits which they themselves were never to see? And how many Johnny Appleseeds of the spirit have sewn love and hope in our hearts where otherwise there would be a desert?

For it is through love that we learn to see perfection where there are flaws; even more important, it is through love that we can grasp perfection even though we ourselves are very imperfect. It is through this love that we, regardless of the shortness or the length of the days granted to us on this earth, can add our own measure to that abundance which is the unique product of love.

Surely, if there is any message or meaning in this Season, with its tragedies and its hope, it is to remind us that the Creation which we enjoy is not a countinghouse.