



+ Dear Family and Friends,

The days are growing short. Winter daylight is fading early, as i'm watching the chickadees quickly snatching a few last sunflower seeds from the bird feeder. From my armchair by the window i can enjoy their antics all day long, as i look over the edge of my computer. Now, they are leaving for the night and all is getting still. But i keep looking out at the snowfall and the nightfall, savoring the special mood of this darkest season of the year.

This is also the season when all the great traditions celebrate festivals of light, festivals of hope. But are those celebrations really more than a mere whistling in the dark? I think of the state of our world and ask myself: are they not almost frivolous, our pitiful ways of turning off the news and reenacting annual family rituals. Is there more to all this than childhood memories and sentimentality? Well, i think there is. I have found one redeeming feature that our many different ways of celebrating this season have in common: all of them are, in their best moments, the occasion for what my friend Anthony Chavez calls "Cosmic Tears", tears in which pain and joy flow together.

Are you alert to the stirring of such tears? We tend to overlook or quickly forget them, but they are a surpassing gift. They prepare our hearts to let life take hold of us and guide us. Most of the time, we keep our hands rigidly on the steering wheel. But at those poignant moments when rigidity melts into tears, life gets a chance to take over. And life knows best.

If we shut our hearts to the pain of the world our celebrations become superficial. If we let that pain overwhelm our hope, we are lost in the dark. Tears in which pain and joy flow together do justice to life in its fullness. Indeed, we are lost, but Life knows the way home.

This, then, is what i wish you most fervently at this season: to notice its special tears when they come. They cleanse our eyes and let us see that it makes sense to trust Life and to trust in one another. May this guide us safely through 2024.

Your brother David

I'd like to highly recommend a book written in this spirit: Rutger Bregman; *Humankind: A Hopeful History*.

