From the Pulpit submission

When I am weak then I am strong.

There is a tree which stands in the front garden at St Luke Episcopal Church. It was tall and slender and it was planted some years ago by a parishioner. I say ‘was’ because in the week following Thanksgiving, I discovered on a Friday morning that the tree had been sawn off and the top taken away, leaving a rough looking five foot stump. We are not sure why this was done. It might have been needed for a Christmas tree or it might have been an act of vandalism. Whatever the reason, a tree that we would pass by daily with hardly a notice, became an object of great affection. In its diminished state it seemed to cry out to be noticed. A few days later lights appeared for the first time on the tree, and in the following weekend the family who planted it adorned it with a brightly lit star. Within days Christmas ornaments appeared as from nowhere and suddenly this sad little diminished tree became a a beacon drawing attention from all who passed by.

Just this last week, a friend sent along the photograph which appears with these thoughts. There you see this wonderful little tree which no one noticed before, only now it is decorated and dazzles the eye, especially at night. Beneath the photograph these words appear…”When I a weak then I am strong.” These words are a quotation from St Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians, (12.10). I marveled at the spiritual wisdom of placing this picture and the words of St Paul together. It is an encouraging and surprising thought that we could find strength in weakness.

I think this is true. Like our little tree, that was passed by and went unnoticed, maybe the circumstances of life seem to want to cut you short….leaving you standing bare topped and wounded. And as the world swirls on, it might seem like none of that matters and no one cares. But remember what happened to the little tree. Once easily forgotten, suddenly we couldn’t look away, and it began to shine and then a star appeared and then it began to sparkle with a brightness and a glory, such that now we cannot imagine it any other way. Its beauty is revealed through its vulnerability and its strength is revealed in its weakness.

I think this is so for all of us. God has a dream for us which is often revealed in weakness. We are now so much closer to Christmas than when the tree was cut. And yet again God is revealing strength through weakness. Mary and Joseph are making their way to Bethlehem, and soon an infant will come. And I suppose there is no reason why we should remember this particular family, so ordinary…so like any others. Indeed I suspect that a great many will pass by without noticing, because after all, there is so much to do and life is full of unremarkable things. It’s even possible that we might all have said one time or other with the Innkeeper …”Sorry…no room in the inn.” And yet, if we could take the time to look in the humble manger, there God is saying…”when I am weak then I am strong.” For the Christmas story is not told in the big and the bright and the shiny, but in a humble manger. There we catch a glimpse of the light, perhaps we see the star, and then we become aware of a brightness and a glory that we had passed by so many time. God is coming into the world.

So this Christmas, go and see for yourself. Take the time to go to a manger near you and look in. I mean, pause and really look. Because there the maker or all that is will be looking for you. And if you come to the manger in our little church, say hello to our little tree, and say a prayer of gratitude that God is revealed in weak and little things. 