

“Hear Ye Hear Ye: Sanctity of Life”

Scripture: Psalm 139; Proverbs 31:8-9

Graphics: newspaper, fetus, abortion headlines

Big Truth: We live in a day when news, as it’s happening, is at our fingertips at all times. We are inundated with news of war, political struggles, economic problems like inflation, moral dilemmas like abortion and human sexuality, science, nature, history, and more. As followers of Jesus, we are regularly reminded to not be afraid and not worry. Yet with all that’s happening, can we just live and love like Jesus? This series will help the people of Panama UMC to focus their thinking and praying to the God who is sovereign and loving, and to then go into the world to love and serve in Jesus’ name.

Focus Phrase:

1. Introduction

- A. *Hear Ye, Hear Ye!* That’s the title of this sermon series. It’s all about the latest headlines. But it’s really more than that, of course. It’s about how we, as followers of Jesus in the 21st Century, are to interpret, respond to, and live in this world now - with everything that goes on around us...as we look forward to the vision God has for us in the Kingdom.
- B. Last week, we spent time allowing Jesus’ words in Matthew and Paul’s words in Romans to convince us that even though there will be WAR and rumors of WAR, we are to go out into the world to bring hope to the hopeless. We, as Methodist believers, firmly believe that war is incompatible with the teachings and example of Christ, as outlined in our doctrine. I pray this past week, you’ve had the chance to be a hope-giving, Kingdom-visioned, peace-maker.
- C. This morning, we’re going to another hot topic that’s made headlines lately. And not only has this headline made the news, but it’s started massive arguments on social media, protests, further polarized our country, and even was rife with scandal and Supreme Courts leaks.
- D. The headline read, “Hear Ye Hear Ye, The Supreme Court overturns Roe vs. Wade.” And as I began to read and watch people’s reactions to that decision from the highest court in the country, I was so incredibly saddened at the intensity of the vitriol from some people. It’s OK for Christians to have passion...but passion that turns to hatred and intense venom is not OK.
- E. The topic of abortion and the wide range of emotions, moral wrestling, and difficult circumstances that lead to it, and the arguments about it, are endless and diverse, it seems. Even within the church of Jesus Christ, there is a wide understanding of how the church should respond to abortion providers, government abortion funding, and women who have had, are having, or will have abortions.

- F. So, what does scripture say? What does the church doctrine say? And, most impact-fully today for us, how can the church speak God's truth and live God's grace as we talk about and engage the world about the sanctity of unborn life?
- G. One caveat that I confess is that I am obviously not a woman and so have never been faced with decisions about terminating a pregnancy.
- H. As a pastor, though, I have counseled and talk with women who have made the choice to have an abortion at some point in their lives. While I don't know what that decision was fully like, I know that it was difficult, resulting in powerful emotions, including shame, guilt, regret, relief, numbness, and confusion.
- I. The Church of Jesus Christ has not always done well in the ways that we proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ to those who have had abortions, lost children in childbirth, or faced difficult reproductive circumstances. In fact, for many, the Church has been a painful source of condemnation and shame in the aftermath of that decision or circumstances in a woman's life. And, we've failed to care for those who face unwanted pregnancies and decisions about the future of their unborn child.
- J. This sermon, like the sermon from last week on war, is not a political statement about abortion or even Roe vs Wade and the subsequent decisions by states to provide abortions or not.
- K. This sermon is aimed at giving us Kingdom hope and a Kingdom mission to protect the most vulnerable lives among us while caring for all those who God puts in our ministry path. We'll take a look at God's plan for humanity and life, where the church stands based on God's word, and how the people of Christ are called to provide for, love, and offer grace and support to anyone who has made the difficult decisions about abortion.
- L. What we need right now is some prayer. Would you join me in inviting the Holy Spirit to guide my words and open our hearts? Let's PRAY...
- M. **PRAY!** (Jesus, you are Lord...)
- N. The place to begin when we want to know God's desire for life is the beginning of life itself in Genesis 1. After God created light and sun and moon and land and animals and fish, we get to Genesis 1:26, and we read this:

2. Scripture

A. READ Genesis 1:26-31

- i. Scripture gives us a very clear message that the author of life is our Creator God. God designed us in a very specific - a very unique way - to not only live and breathe air, but to miraculously create NEW life right inside of a woman's body. In the Genesis context, Adam and Eve are not only put in

charge of life on earth, but are given the opportunity to create NEW life...to fruitfully multiply and fill the earth.

- ii. I don't know about you, but the incredible process of a human being coming to life in the womb is about the most amazing miracle there is. We, as people of faith, celebrate God's design for procreation and sustaining life.
- iii. God loves us so much, that He's given the ability to make new life, so that we can care for, sustain, and even increase in the earth. And when he created life and gave it His design, He called it VERY GOOD.
- iv. In contrast, anything that stands in the way of God's design is not God's best plan for our lives. The sad reality we face is that sometimes our bodies can't procreate. Babies die in the womb, which causes incredible pain. There are still other times when a mother's life is endangered by something tragic happening in the womb. And, at still other times, a woman chooses to terminate a pregnancy, shifting the design of God into a human decision.
- v. In every one of those difficult and painful times and decisions, no matter what the outcome, God's love for us doesn't fail...He cares for and loves each one of us because (as we read in Genesis) He made us. He may weep with the circumstances and decisions, but he loves us because He is the maker of life.
- vi. We see the intimacy that God has for us in Psalm 139:

B. READ Psalm 139:13-16

- i. **“For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed.”**
- ii. This is a poetic expression that tells us that the beginning of human life is not just a biological event. It's a result of the will and work of a caring Creator God.
- iii. God is actively involved in this process, in utero, knitting a person together. In Job 10:11, Job said, “You clothed me with skin and flesh and knit me together with bones and sinews.”
- iv. And, if we read the whole of Psalm 139, we find that not only is this biblical support for the sanctity of life from conception, but this is also a psalm that declares that God knows and is with the psalmist in all circumstances of life, including in the womb.

- C. Throughout the Bible, we find references to the value that God places on life... and life from the very beginning.
- i. “This is what the LORD says — your Redeemer, who formed you in the womb: I am the LORD, the Maker of all things, who stretches out the heavens, who spreads out the earth by myself...” (Isaiah 44:24).
 - ii. Psalm 100:3, “Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his, we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.” (Psalm 100:3)
 - iii. “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.” (Jeremiah 1:5)
 - iv. “But when He who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through His grace.” (Galatians 1:15)
 - v. “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for giving us through Christ every possible spiritual benefit as citizens of heaven! For consider what he has done — before the foundation of the world He chose us to become, in Christ, His holy and blameless children living within His constant care.” (Ephesians 1:3-4)
- D. It’s clear that God values life. He values every life. He values life so much that He’s willing to create us, form us, and give us a plan and purpose.
- E. And God has an incredible love and care for us, especially those who cannot care for themselves. We don’t like to think that God plays favorites, but I can tell you from the witness of scripture, God cares for and defends those who are powerless, weak, defenseless, and unable to care for themselves.
- F. The best example of that is when Jesus told the disciples to not block the young children from coming to Him...and he took them in his arms and blessed them.
- G. That’s especially true for an unborn child in the womb...the least of all.
- H. But what do we believe as a Church...as a denomination?
- i. Our Methodist Social Principles state this about the sanctity of human life, *“The sacredness of all life compels us to resist the practice of abortion except in the cases of tragic conflicts of life against life when the wellbeing of the mother and the child are at stake. We do not accept abortion as a means of birth control or gender selection, and we call upon all Christians as disciples of the Lord of Life to prayerfully consider how we can support those women facing unintended pregnancies without adequate care, counsel, or resources”*
 - ii. Our Methodist doctrine highly values the life of the unborn, right from conception, as a reflection of God’s image in the creation of that child. And we believe that abortion is never to be used for any other reason than when the life of the child or mother is at imminent risk.

- iii. But what I love most about our doctrine is that it also lifts up the mission of the church to support all women who are facing an unwanted pregnancy, or who, in the past, has had an abortion.

3. Application

- A. Whether you consider yourself pro-choice or pro-life or some combination of the above, or maybe you don't know, **we are called to join God in the utmost care and protection of the most vulnerable amongst us.**
- B. At times, that may mean walking alongside someone who is considering having an abortion to gracefully help them see that God values the life growing inside her...because He created that child. And that there are alternatives to abortion.
- C. I'm convinced that making laws and making abortion legal or not, or who gets to decide what the law says, is best left for the secular courts and civic lawmakers. The overturn of Roe vs Wade has now pushed the decision about abortion legality to the states instead of the federal government. I don't know what impact that will have.
- D. But I do know that God's word and God's will, that run like a thread through the whole breadth of scripture, give us what we need to know: **all of life is sacred and God desires every life to find as full a life as God desires to provide.**
- E. One of the challenges I see with our current political system, and even in the church, is that instead of walking alongside women and couples that face unwanted pregnancy, we are tempted to shame them.
- F. God has high standards for sexual ethics, and has given the gift of procreation to a married couple as a way to sustain the human race. Yet, we're all sinners saved by grace and sometimes the gift of procreation is misused.
- G. The fact that none of us is sinless puts us all on equal footing before the Lord, which gives us empathy for anyone who is facing unwanted pregnancy or who has had an abortion.
- H. Our response - our godly response - must be so much more than condemnation. Our response to women who have had or are considering the painful decision to have an abortion, must begin with God's grace and truth. This is all for the sake of the unborn child growing in that mother's womb.
- I. John Sloan said this, "The woman who has undergone abortion and has turned in faith to Jesus need never be concerned that God is against her or is looking to punish her. She is a daughter of the Most High King. And she is beloved." (<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/when-you-preach-on-abortion-dont-leave-christ-behind/>)
- J. Proverbs 31:8-9 gives us this commission: "Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out; judge righteously; defend the rights of the poor and needy."

- K. Our main mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. As people come to know the forgiveness, love, grace, and mercy of God through Jesus Christ, **healing happens**. The church is called to be part of God's healing, as we're called to proclaim to the world that we believe God's plan is for life to be lived and never ended.
- L. We have the commission to go out into the world to speak life - God's life - as we give God's hope to those who are seeking hope.
- M. So, as it relates to our mission here at PUMC, we have to ask ourselves,
 - i. "How does the ministry of Panama UMC impact the world as a proclaimer of life?"
 - ii. Are we actively engaged in walking alongside women who are facing unwanted pregnancies?
 - iii. What about sex trafficking?
 - iv. What about women in low-income circumstances who decide to keep and raise children?
 - v. How do our ministries help women who decide to have a child from an unwanted pregnancy to connect with people who are seeking to adopt?
 - vi. Maybe another question is: how do we minister as a pro-life Methodist congregation after a child is born?"
- N. I don't have the answers to all those questions, but I pray the Holy Spirit can lead us deeper - missionally and intentionally - into ways to be the hands and feet of Jesus. I pray we begin to seek ways to do that in our communities.

4. Conclusion

- A. The overturning of Roe vs Wade by the current Supreme Court may be the latest headline, but God's plans have never changed - He is the giver of Life.
- B. While God has given us the freedom to choose, He expects us to choose Him and choose life. We, church, are called to spread God's grace and love to the world, no matter what choices we or others have made.
- C. **Let's pray**...O God, be tangibly engaged with all those who must make hard decisions about pregnancy...that they find your will and receive your gracious guidance towards life. Show us how to be channels through which your loving help flows to those in crisis...