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Title: *The Sanctity of Human Life*

Text: Genesis 1:26-27; Psalm 139:13-16

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I've been preaching now for a little over 24 years---not that I'm counting! In all this time one thing I have learned is that delivering a sermon can upset people.

I'm not complaining, it is a great privilege to preach. In fact, asking for and receiving God's guidance as you prepare and then preach--it's a caliber of joy that is hard to describe---but sometimes the words that I happily prepare can make others very---well, UNhappy.

And this is not a new thing; all pastors have dealt with unhappy people when the Bible's teaching conflicts with those people's viewpoints.

Here are a few examples:

- When we were in Louisville attending Southern Seminary, I was told that pastors in that area avoided preaching about the dangers of alcohol. because if they didn't it would offend all the people in their congregations who made their living working in Louisville's breweries.
- In the part of Kentucky where the main crop was tobacco, it was a no-no to preach about how smoking was damaging the body God gave you---because most church members were farmers and tobacco was their cash crop.
- In churches in the south preaching about the sin of racism was---and still is---something that upsets many white parishioners.

And in the past few years this issue of "upset parishioners" has gotten even worse---as literally everything has become politicized. I mean, these days no matter what you say from a pulpit is going to upset someone. I once read that a pastor's job in preaching is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable, and these days even when you try to comfort the afflicted, there is a very good chance that you are also going to afflict the comfortable. But that's the job. Men and women who are called to teach God's Word---are called to teach all of it---even those texts that make people uncomfortable or angry.

The reason I mention all this is to prepare you---because today I'm dealing with one of those topics that many find uncomfortable---the Sanctity of Human Life. Many pastors avoid this subject; they'd rather chew sand. But it is a foundational issue that must be addressed. I mean, this may be a highly politicized topic, but it is also a moral topic and because it is, we need the guidance of Scripture.

And, like the dreaded Omicron Covid variant that is spreading like wildfire, this is a moral issue that affects all of us. My study this week revealed that since Roe v. Wade began, somewhere between 24 and 30 percent of all pregnancies in the U.S. have been terminated. *Newsweek* reports that in these nearly five decades as many as 40% of American women have had an abortion. If these stats are even close to being true, then there are surely some who are listening to my words who have either terminated a pregnancy or known someone who has.

With that in mind, I'm praying that God will join us as we study His Word, such that we will not only understand why abortion is wrong---but will also be motivated to share love and grace to people on the other side---people whose views upset us. I want Redland to be the kind of church that people who have been hurt by this issue will run to and not from.

Before we look to the Scripture let's get updated on this topic. I mean, it's been several years since I have devoted an entire sermon to this subject and I discovered this week that things have changed since then in a couple ways.

For example:

**a. Abortion has become a global issue.**

I was glad to read this week that abortion rates in the U.S. have dropped, but I was sad to discover that at the same time abortions worldwide have increased. In fact, abortion has become the leading cause of death worldwide. In 2018, forty-one million human lives were snuffed out through abortion---when only eight million died of cancer.

In Russia back in 2005 there were more abortions than there were births. Vladimir Kulakov, vice president of the Russian Academy of Medical Sciences, said, "About 1.6 million women had an abortion that year---a fifth of them under the age of 18, and about 1.5

*million gave birth. Many more abortions weren't reported. The abortions, combined with a birth rate lower than the death rate, is 'leading to a population decline of about 750,000 to 800,000 a year.'*"

Mike Woodruff points out that this problem has not just affected Russia. He writes, *"Many European countries have fallen below the sustainability line. In order for the population to remain stable, married couples need to have 2.11 children. But there has been a fairly steep decline in the number of people who marry and the average number of children born every year has also dropped. Many countries have fallen below the 1.3 number, which demographers call the 'death spiral.'*"

Here's something else I have noticed.

**b. The debate has changed.**

Talking about abortion has become hard because people are so angry about it. But these arguments aren't the same as they once were. I mean, these days we don't read much about arguments over when life begins. Most people concede that it begins at conception---which is probably one reason the rate is down in the U.S. The debate has changed such that it doesn't center around when life begins but rather when the child or fetus has rights.

Nor do we hear much these days about keeping abortion legal to protect the life of the mother. This is because thanks to advances in medicine and prenatal care--that almost never happens.

Okay, time to go to the Scripture.

If you are able, I ask that we stand in respect for God's Word as it's read and follow along as I read Genesis 1:26 and 27 and then Psalm 139 verses 13-16.

Genesis 1:26-27

**26 - Then God said, "Let us make mankind in Our image, in Our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky---over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."**

**27 - So God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them.**

Psalm 139:13-16

**13 - For You created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother's womb.**

**14 - I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are wonderful, I know that full well.**

**15- My frame was not hidden from You when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.**

**16 - Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be.**

Okay, with these and other passages in mind what DOES the Bible say about this issue?

**1.) First it says that human life is SACRED.**

As we just read, God formed people like you in me while we were in our mother's womb. But more than that, He formed us in His image. That is not said about any other created being--even angels. Of course, "image" refers to someone who resembles someone else---like a son who is the image of his father. Well, since God is spirit, image and likeness cannot refer to physical appearance; so these terms refer to inner qualities, like the ability of human beings to reason, to enter into relationships---especially with God.

Obviously, God's purpose for creating human beings was to make creatures like Himself with whom He could relate. This tells us that the Sanctity of Human life is indeed a foundational issue because it does not only affect our views on abortion. The Bible tells us that all humans---all of us---have value independent of who we are or what we can do. There is a divine imprint on our souls that gives us significance whether we are white or black, rich or poor, educated or uneducated--wanted or not wanted---whether we are adding value to the world or not. Infants, the elderly, those who are disabled, those who are debilitated by strokes or diseases like Alzheimer's and are now unable function---have value because God gave them value. He made them in HIS image.

If you've read the creation account---like the 35 of you who are doing the Chronological Bible Reading this year---then you know that we see this value in the way humans were created. I mean, the creation of Adam and Eve differed from all the other acts of creation described in Genesis chapter 1. In each of the OTHER acts of creation God said, **"Let there be,"** and it was so.

God SPOKE and creation occurred. ONLY the creation of human life begins, *“Let us MAKE man...”* So---God didn’t just speak us into existence as He did everything else---He MADE us.

To create the first human, verse 7 of Genesis 2 says, *“God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.”*

God did not *“BREATHE the breath of life”* into any other creature so, human life was MADE differently. From the very beginning human life was special---precious---SACRED.

Of course, the greatest indication of the value of all human life---the best way to see how sacred it really is---is to remember that God SACRIFICED His own Son so that we could be saved from our sins. That is an estimation of human worth beyond our comprehension.

When Sue gets something donated to Grace in Store she goes online to get an idea as to its worth---so as to set a price. Many times she learns something is very valuable---and she will contact the donor and give it back---because it’s worth too much to give away. Well, we don’t have to go online to see how much we are worth. Our value is indicated by the fact that God not only loved us enough to CREATE us in His image, He also loved us enough to pay the unbelievable cost of REDEEMING us. Romans 5:8 says, *“God demonstrates His own love—He shows how much He values human life in this—while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”* The words to that song we all sang as children are so VERY true, *“Red and yellow, black and white, they are PRECIOUS in His sight.”* As C.S. Lewis once wrote, there is no such thing as a *“MERE mortal.”*

Human life is SACRED.

Here’s something else the Bible teaches on this issue.

### **2.) It says that children are a blessing from God.**

They are a precious gift from our Heavenly Father. Psalm 127:3ff says, *“Behold children are a gift of the Lord. The fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them.”*

Anyone who has held a baby knows this--when we hold a child we all marvel at God’s amazing handiwork. But many people in our world no longer look at children like that and our laws reflect this tragic perspective. Did you know that it is illegal to transport a pregnant lobster for fear of hurting all the little pre-born lobsters? At the same time in most states a pregnant teen can be transported to an abortion facility without her parent’s permission or even knowledge.

I read this week of a man in San Antonio, Texas who rescued a nine-month-old infant that was trapped in a locked car on a hot summer day. The child’s mother had accidentally locked the baby and her keys inside---and she had been trying to get into the car---but had been unsuccessful. As the temperature in the car rose, the baby turned purple and began to foam at the mouth. The man saw all this, grabbed a hammer from the toolbox in his trunk and used it to break the rear window so they could open the door and get the baby out---but instead of thanking him, the child’s mother was furious with him for breaking her car window. Stories like this show that our country is in essence infected with a diseased way of thinking that attacks the basis of all human worth---much like a virus attacks the human body.

And again, this “virus” is not only seen in abortion---but in the racial injustice that still plagues our nation---and the slavery that still exists in so many other nations. It’s seen in any way we respond to the poor and the imprisoned.

That leads to me to point out something else the Bible says:

### **3.) We are expected to protect the weak.**

God has a special place in his heart for the poor and oppressed, for the widow and orphan, for the powerless, for the homeless, for those people that others tend to exclude. This certainly includes the defenseless unborn, not to mention the thousands of children who are in foster care.

God calls us to give ourselves for the weak, whoever they are. We are to love them---help them, even when it’s not convenient. Indeed, Jesus goes so far as to say, that as we treat them, we treat Him. Do you remember His words in Matthew 25? *“I was hungry and you gave ME something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave ME something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited ME in. I*

***needed clothes and you clothed ME, I was sick and you looked after ME, I was in prison and you came to visit ME.***” As Christians we are the flesh God uses to help the hurting---protect those who can’t protect themselves.

And in case you haven’t see this yet---here’s something else the Bible says:

#### **4.) Abortion is wrong.**

We see this from the very beginning. In Exodus 21:22ff it says, ***“If people are fighting and hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely but there is no serious injury---the offender must be fined whatever the woman’s husband demands and the court allows. But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.”***

The principle God gives us here and in other passages is that an unborn child has the same legal rights as an adult. Let me point out that one reason abortion the Bible teaches that abortion is wrong---one reasons human life is so precious is because a human---and only a human---can impact eternity. People---who of course begin their existence at conception---people can make a difference not only in this world but in the next.

Did you know Steve Jobs was adopted? I’m sure all you APPLE fans would agree that he made a difference in this world. Many of you are looking at my sermon notes right now on an APPLE phone or laptop.

Did you know that Ethyl Waters---that great Gospel singer was conceived following the rape of her 13-year-old mother? Her most popular song, *“His Eye is on the Sparrow”* reminds us how precious we all are to God.

Do you remember the true story I told about an infant abandoned on the streets of Nairobi who was adopted by an American doctor? That baby grew up to be world-renowned as an orthopedic surgeon.

HUMANS can make a difference in this world---they can make things better---and when they accept Jesus as Lord and Savior---they can impact eternity itself.

In his song, *Lullaby for the Innocents*,” Michael Card sings:

*“What your life might have been we’ll never know.*

*A miracle happened, but there’s nothing to show.*

*We’re left with the sorrow but hope all the same  
that in Heaven there is someone who knows you by name.”*

This week I came across a story of about a Christian woman who stood outside abortion clinics urging the women who went in not to terminate their pregnancy. She wondered if doing this was worth it---wondered if it really helped. Then she got this message on Facebook:

*“I’m not sure you remember me. I met you 20 years ago outside of Women Services on Main St. I was only 15-years-old. You saved my son’s life. I was alone, there to start a two-day procedure. However, that night I felt my son move. The next day on my way into the building I met you. I believe you read me some scriptures and made me aware of other options. So, I decided to ... continue with the pregnancy. You were truly a blessing to me. Today my son is almost 20 years old. He’s the best thing that ever happened to me. When I think of him, I often think of you.”*

Abortion is wrong.

Here’s something else the Bible clearly teaches:

#### **5.) Abortion is not the unforgiveable sin.**

Yes, NOT embracing the Sanctity of Human life is wrong. It is a sin. But God is bigger than our sin---ANY sin. As the old hymn puts it, *“Marvelous grace of our loving Lord---grace that EXCEEDS our sin and our guilt...”* There is nothing we can do that will move us beyond His love and grace.

No matter WHAT our sin---and we ALL sin---if we confess it to God, ***“He is faithful to forgive us and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*** (1<sup>st</sup> John 1:9) In Romans 5:20 Paul says, ***“Where sin increased, grace increased all the more.”*** God loves us all and He waits for us to confess our sin and receive His forgiveness and restoration. As Alcoholics Anonymous reminds us, *“We are only as sick as our secrets.”* God waits to forgive us and HEAL us.

The Catholic church runs a ministry to women who have had abortions. It is called PROJECT RACHEL and its purpose is to administer forgiveness and healing to women who have gone through with this. I was moved to read the testimonies of women who realized the horrible mistake they had made and who felt unbelievable guilt and alienation---these women were relieved of this burden by receiving the healing forgiveness of God. The loving treatment they received from the church helped them to understand how precious human life really is.

Okay with all this in mind? How are we to help? What can we do as Christians---to preserve the Sanctity of Human life?

**a. We must do our part to help change unjust laws.**

We live in a democracy and we should take advantage of that---voting for congressmen and senators who we know BELIEVE in human life's sanctity. We must pray for our Supreme Court justices that they will realize the error of past courts' rulings and work to change them. You know, many people say is that the Supreme Court must rule on the precedent set with Row V. Wade happened---that nothing can be done to change that precedent. One thing I would say in response is that most of the people I read about this week who understand constitutional law----say that Row v Wade was poorly argued---that it was not a good judgment. But even if it was---the Supreme Court has overruled itself in the past.

For example, in 1899 in Plessy v. Ferguson, the court ruled that segregated schools was constitutional. But 55 years later---in Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, the United States Supreme Court held that segregation of students in public schools---violates the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, because separate facilities are inherently unequal.

The men and women who sit on our nation's highest court are far from infallible. They make mistakes---and precedent shows that they can and have corrected their mistakes. I pray that this court or another court will eventually see the error of the Row v Wade ruling and will begin to right that terrible wrong. We should all pray in that way.

But we must do more than write our leaders and vote for pro-life candidates. We must do more than pray that the Supreme court will come to its senses.

**b. As Christians we also must to practice what we preach.**

We need to foster children---we need to help the hungry---the homeless---the poor. We need to speak out against racial injustice. And when it comes to abortion, we need to honor God's loving law that says sex is for marriage.

As I said a few weeks back---it has become common for people---even Christians---to live together BEFORE they marry. Well Christians can't criticize people who are pregnant out of wedlock and seeking an abortion---when they embrace the same lifestyle. The sad hypocritical fact is that for too many believers---sex is no longer limited to marriage. We should know better. After all we have been taught that our bodies are not our own to do with as we please.

Do you remember how Paul puts it in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6:19-20?

***“Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, Who is in you, Whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.”*** (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6:19-20)

Our bodies belong to God. They are entrusted to us. They are on loan to us. It's like when you rent a car---you will be held accountable for how you used that car when you turn it in. One day we will give an account for how we used these bodies God has loaned us. Many Christians need to repent of this sin---we all have to practice what we preach.

Here's something else we must do.

**c. We must help the hurting.**

Building on what I said earlier---we must lovingly minister to those who are on “the other side” of this issue---those who vote opposite to our beliefs---even those who vehemently favor the “pro-choice” stance. After all, Jesus commanded us to love even those who oppose us when we try to do His will so, our response to people on the other side of this issue should clearly reflect the love of God.

Let me put it this way. It is never RIGHT to fight WRONG in a WRONG way. We are never justified to use the devil's tools to attack his work. When we do we are no better than he is.

We are never to hate sinner---only the sin. Those on the other side must never doubt our genuine love for them in spite of our disagreeing with their position on the issue or how to fight it.

A few years ago, I read a great article in CHRISTIANITY TODAY, written by Frederica Matthewes-Green---who wisely advises us that pro-life strategies must include showing that we not only value the baby but the mother of the baby. In short, we must not just be pro-baby---but pro-mother and pro-father as well. Remember---abortion not only stops a human heart it breaks a mother's heart.

A man whose wife had abortion and then drifted into severe depression wrote,  
*"They told her it would give her control over her body, but what kind of tradeoff is that to gain control of your body and loose control of your mind?"*

The cruel irony is that abortion has been presented as something that would set a woman free when it really doesn't. So, one way we minister to people in all of this is to communicate the value of not only the babies but of their mothers as well.

I think we also need to try to put ourselves in these people's shoes and try to understand why they had an abortion in the first place. Many times the truth is they felt forced to do so. Their families may have pushed them to do this or their boyfriends. Statistics show that abortion is often an act of despair. In fact, 70% of women undergoing abortions admit that they believed it was morally wrong but they felt they had no other choice. Some women turn to abortion because it is not convenient for them to have a child---but MOST women who do so are poor---and scared.

Ms. Mathwes-Green traveled the country interviewing women who had abortions. She writes: *"The core reason I heard was, 'I had an abortion because someone I loved told me to.' Again and again, I learned that women had abortions because they felt abandoned, they felt isolated and afraid. As one woman said, 'I felt like everyone would support me if I had an abortion, but if I had the baby I'd be alone. If felt like I didn't have a choice. If only one person had stood by me, even a stranger, I would have had the baby.'"*

God calls His children to stand with people who are hurting---people like this woman. We have to step up and make them know they are NOT alone---that we will help them.

Finally, we must:

#### **d. Distribute the Cure.**

As we said last year---our world is sick. And the disease that plagues us all is older than Covid---because I'm referring to sin sickness. Abortion and laws that devalue human life are symptoms of this disease. And, as necessary as they are, all the marching and voting and legislation in the world will not cure a sin sick heart. Changing laws won't change the demands of sinful people.

If we ONLY change laws we are treating the symptoms not the disease itself. It would be like treating strep throat with cough drops while all along we have a 10-day supply of penicillin in the medicine cabinet. The best way to help people value life as God values life is to introduce them to God. This is the cure. Knowing Jesus is the ONLY way to change people's hearts.

Do you remember the time that the people of Israel were wandering in the desert and they were attacked by a plague of poisonous snakes? God told Moses to fashion a bronze serpent to a staff and put it on a hill and said that whoever would look up to see that serpent on the staff would be healed. Jesus referred to this in John 3 when He told Nicodemus that, ***"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up."*** Jesus was affirming that this is a sin-sick world---and that whoever would be healed could look up to the cross and receive forgiveness and eternal life---and a new heart---a new nature.

Let's pray.