

What if We Started With Life?

Job 10: 11-12; Isaiah 44: 24; Luke 1: 39-41

**First Presbyterian Church
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Do you ever ponder how amazing it is that your body just works? How wondrous is a human being! I take it for granted that I just drink from my coffee cup when I want to, no big deal. But when you think about the miracle of volition, of will. My brain decides that I, this person that I am, want to move my hand to reach for my coffee

cup. An electro/chemical signal shoots from my brain to the muscles in my arm, hand and fingers. I may still be reading while the cup comes up to my lips, which also get a signal to suck inwards. The taste buds on my tongue note the temperature and the taste of the coffee. Automatically, a stunning swallow reflex sends the liquid down my throat, most times without get confused with breathing and making me choke. Down it goes into the digestive system where it is chemically broken down and distributed, especially that yummy stimulant that is caffeine. Even more, my brain recognizes tastes and experiences from memory. I know what this is. I also remember this taste from other times in my life, maybe I think of someone I love with whom I had coffee. My body also anticipates that I will enjoy this drink at this time each day—and woe is me if my coffee is delayed by too many hours. All this is just a fraction of one tiny example of all the complex interaction of the systems in my body. I exist in the combination of will and action, brain and muscles, thought and expression, memory and experience.



I think of the uniqueness of a human being compared to all the other in the world. Some animals do indeed have kinds of speech, whales and birds and monkeys. But human speech is a quantum leap beyond any other being. We can form words with our mouths. We can also write and read words, expressing speech even more powerfully in a non-auditory way. It is normal for humans to

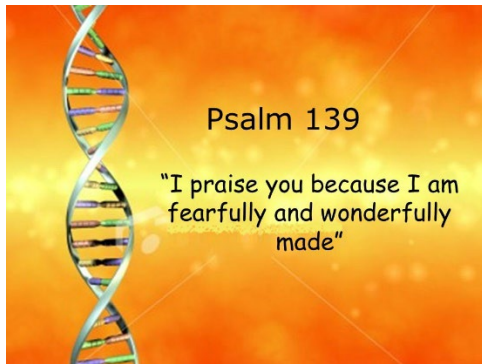
interpret the symbols that are letters and decipher the combinations of these letters

in words. We comprehend and we are able to respond using the same alphabet symbols. Just reading an article on your phone is miracle of complexity—the complexity in your brain far, far exceeding the gorgeous technology in your device.



I think too of the wonder of consciousness. Human awareness is unlike that of any other animal. I've had dogs so aware of when dinner time should be that you could set your watch by them. But they do not know when it's their birthday. They do not mark Christmas as any different from any other day. My dog Ani can read emotion. In fact, I have to restrain my expression of how much I love her, because it makes her nervous.

Blissfully, she is not aware that she's getting old. She's not worried that she's going to die. She does not ponder the meaning of her life or worry that she may be wasting time lying around all day. But human beings know the joy and poignancy of being aware that we are alive, that we will die, that we were meant to have purpose and find meaning. We alone have the ability to reflect on the past and to define hope for the future beyond our immediate needs.



In our Call to Worship today, we spoke Psalm 139, "For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made!" Unique among creatures, we acknowledge a source. The wonder of life fills us with the intuition that the world must be more than the survival of the fittest random mutations that somehow grew ever more complex through

the eons. An intelligence conceived of us. A personal higher power called us into being. God gives us the meaning of our lives we long to embrace.

I'd like to show you a video of the beautiful journey we take from conception to the daylight world. This film is a rigorously researched animated view of life's development. It gives us the perspective of being *inside* the womb. Only in the last few years has our technology allowed us to see inside this secret place where we were wrought.

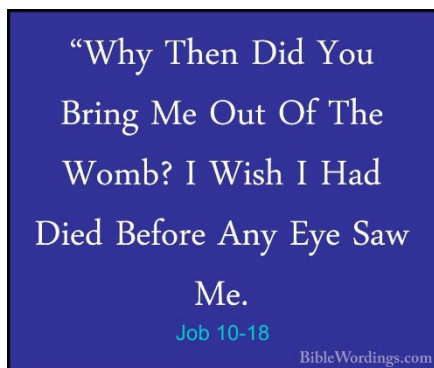
Meet Baby Olivia. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDevWL44fSs>)

Let's take a moment to be aware of how we're feeling after watching Olivia. Quiet. Hushed. Moved, but not like the way waves move on the surface of the water. More like the way deep currents wind through the depths of the sea. I have seen something holy. Beautiful. I know in my bones I am witnessing life growing. Personhood forming. Fearful and wonderful.



The book of Job recounts the story of a righteous man whose faith was tested to the depths by intense suffering and loss. Job never ceased engaging a sovereign, personal God as both the source and the answer to his pain. In the midst of his suffering, Job reflected on the fact that he was created uniquely by God. So we read, "Your hands fashioned and made me... You clothed me with skin and flesh, and

knit me together with bones and sinews. You have granted me life and steadfast love" (10: 8-12). Paul would echo these words in his message to the Athenians, "The God who made the world...himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything" (Acts 17: 24-25). Our lives are a grant from the God who intended us. He personally loves and he desires to redeem us and save us utterly.



Job entered a season of great suffering. Far beyond his deserving. He took his complaint straight to the same personal God who created him. "Your hands fashioned and made me, and now you have destroyed me altogether. Remember that you have made me like clay; and will you return me to the dust? Look on my affliction...you bring fresh troops against me." He never ceased interacting with God. He did *not* take his life into his own hands, though

he was tempted to do so. Job grew so desperate he questioned God about why he was even made. "Why did you bring me out from the womb? Would that I had died before any eye had seen me...Are not my days few?" He raised the question, "Would I have been better off dying in the womb. Would you have been kinder not to let me into a life such as this?" He asked the question, but he did not take his life into his hands. He knew, as Paul would write to the Corinthians, "You are not your own. You were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (I Cor. 6: 19-20). In the end, Job's vision of the glory and wisdom of God overwhelmed his despair with hope. God turned Job's sense of injustice into gratitude and trust. He

believed his vision that a Redeemer would come in the latter days to the earth (Job 19: 25).

At least three reasons fill me with urgency to raise this theme with you. 1) My hope this morning is that the Holy Spirit has filled you with personal joy and thanksgiving and even wonder for the magnificent gift of life, even life lived under the harsh conditions of earthly existence.

2) I pray very much that the Spirit will touch you viscerally with the deep intuition that every human life is created intentionally by the Triune God and is precious to him. And therefore to us. Such an awareness makes us love each other more. Our own family. Our own community of Christ. Also our own city and world. No child falls outside the range of Christ's care and therefore no child falls outside the loving mission of Christ's church. This has far reaching implications for how we consider sexual intercourse, how we regard others with respect, how we view the purpose of life, freedom and wealth, how we accept the responsibility that comes to us from interdependence with all of humanity.



3) I don't want you to be *gaslighted* in the coming months. Gaslighting has become a popular phrase these days to describe what happens when someone makes you doubt what you've always believed, makes you question whether or not what we've always known to be true is true. The word "gaslighting" is taken from the 1944 movie *Gaslight* in which husband Charles Boyer systemically contrives to make Ingrid Bergman doubt herself and even her own sanity. Boyer is a murderer and a thief. Yet he connives to convince Ingrid Bergman that she is a kleptomaniac and a danger. Gaslighting is all about propaganda. Selling something outrageous until it become normal.

My beloved congregation, already it has begun and will soon become a tsunami. You are going to be gaslighted. The US Supreme Court is considering whether or not the Mississippi heartbeat law is constitutional. If so, the matter of abortion will be returned to the states to decide. If so, the fever pitch of reaction will be nearly overwhelming. If you stand for the sanctity of life from conception, you will be told shrilly that you hate women. That you are anti-science. That you desire to keep women in chains and poor people impoverished. You will doubt what your sanity that tells you when you watch the truth of a video like Baby

Olivia, that life in a womb is created and cherished by God. You will be told that you are responsible for back alley deaths and suicides and misery. Expect it. Cleave to the truth. We long for every child to grow up to realize, “I am fearfully and wonderfully made. You, O God, knit me together in my mother’s womb. How precious to me are your thoughts, O God!”

And whatever happens regarding laws, our commitment to life calls us to a mature Christianity. We’re called far beyond simply demonizing the other side or not caring about the consequences of unwanted pregnancies or procured abortions. Turning back from the reality of a half century of legal abortions demands a profound lament. People do not engage lament, confession and repentance easily. It will take a revolution in our collective mind to realize, as we once had to do with slavery, “This is wrong. We must not do this. We have to find a better way.” Only those who follow a savior who was pierced for our transgressions will have the capacity to enter such sorrow alongside others. We know a savior who has not overlooked or excused one sin but has, at the cost of his own blood, atoned for every single sin. We require mercy, mercy that only the people of Christ can offer through the gospel of Christ. Moreover, we will have to continue to swim upstream in a culture that sexualizes everything and so dehumanizes everyone. We have the highest vision of sexuality and love and commitment ever uttered in the world. Are we living from it and do we know how to share it? We want to guard the dignity of others with respect and sacrifice, courtesy and other-centeredness.

We want to continue to be completely pro-life. That means continuing to build Habitat Houses and overseeing the Catholic/Presbyterian apartments for low income elderly. It means visits in nursing homes and mentoring at Buchanan Elementary School. It means creating and growing a school like Gardere that rescues at risk children from failing schools, and surrounding them with the love of Christ in academic excellence. It means supporting Christian schools and job training courses. It means innovative programs for prison reentry and walking beside families dealing with a crisis pregnancy. All these we are doing and we can do more.

Why? Because all human life is sacred and precious to our God. How do we know that in the deepest way of all? Because we have news, news like no other ever announced on the face of the earth. The eternal God has stepped into our world through the womb of a human being. Jesus became an embryo, alive within the womb of Mary, completely himself but also completely dependent on her. The Son of God became an embryo on behalf of all embryos. He brothered every single human being as he, the Creator God, took up our humanity as his own.

Jesus is the man for all men and women, boys and girls, the man for all humanity, born and unborn. He risked the dangers of birth contractions and the narrow passage into the daylight world. He sanctified our humanity, our conception, every mother's womb, every stage and passage of life. For he embraced it all and keeps it as his own into eternity. We are prolife because our savior is so prolife that we took up our human life as his own. He sacrificed that life that we might know atonement and forgiveness. His Father gave him back that life that joined to him we might be joined to his great redeeming mission in the world.