

TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, AS YOU DID THIS TO LEAST OF
THESE MY BROTHERS,
YOU DID IT TO ME

INTRODUCTION

1. Good Morning and may I say what an honor it is for me to open the Word of God with you all this morning.
 - A. A special thank you to Dcn. Georgette Forney of Anglicans for Life, Fr. Sam Ferguson, Rector here at the Falls Church and Bp. John Guernsey, your founding Bishop and Bishop Ordinary for what... Three more weeks Bp. Joh? Thank you all for the invitation and this very special honor.
 - B. For those of you who do not know me, my name is Eric Vawter Menees and I have the humbling privilege of being the Bishop Ordinary of the Diocese of San Joaquin in Central California.
2. There is no question that this year's March for Life is historic.

- A. Following this summer's Dobbs decision the Supreme Court ended or vacated the Roe v. Wade Decision of 1973.
- B. Of course, that did not end abortions throughout the country, but it did make some serious headway!
- C. While some states restricted or ended access to abortion, others like California are actively recruiting across state lines for women to come to their state to end their pregnancy.
- D. What the Dobbs decision did was put the question of legalized abortions back to the hands of the individual States.
- E. While I'm thrilled with the decision — the idea that a State — any State could legalize the taking of an innocent life is beyond me and I know it grieves the very Heart of God.
- F. Sadly, in my home state of California, and Michigan the voters in November went so far as to enshrine abortion in the State Constitution.

3. We should not be surprised by all of this, however.

- A. Over the past seventy years, my generation, the Boomer Generation, has moved from a Christian ethic which seeks the good of the other prior to the good for the self.
- B. We have believed the Lie and eaten the forbidden fruit in the false belief that we can be like God.
- C. Except, it's not simply a question of knowing Good and Evil.
- D. It is the false belief that *"I am the master of my life and death, my identity, my happiness and well being."*
- E. It is the false idea that *"I have no duty to God, a higher power, a greater good, or ultimately another person because that power and goodness lies in me."*
- F. And therefore the only Duty I have is to myself.
- G. Friends, that is a LIE of the Devil and when we accept that lie as gospel truth, on the Last Day when the trumpet sounds, and it will sound, we will stand before the Lord who will ask us, **"What did you do for the least of these my brothers?"**

H. Let's do a little bible study shall we? I've chosen Matthew 25 as my text for this morning's worship.

I. This choice may seem a little counterintuitive but I hope at the end of this sermon it will make sense.

BIBLE STUDY

4. Allow me to set the scene for our reading today.

A. Jesus has made his grand entrance into Jerusalem drawing the anger and jealousy of both:

B. The Romans who saw that he was received by the people like a victorious king.

C. The Jewish Authorities who witnessed the crowds receiving Jesus like a Messiah - crying out "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" (Mt: 21:9)

quoting/fulfilling Psalm 118

D. Interestingly, Jesus doesn't act in the expected manner of a Messiah or of a King.

- E. He goes to the Temple and overturns the tables of the Money Changers. That angered a bunch of people.
- F. And then, when challenged, Jesus tells the people that they need to pay their taxes saying *“Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”* (Mt. 22:21)
- G. He immediately begins talking about the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple saying, *“You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”* (Mt. 24:2)
- H. And from there he begins to tell everyone who will listen not only what the signs of the end of the ages will be — but upon what God’s Judgment will be based upon.
- I. Spoiler alert — it’s not about how well you know scripture, or how religious you are, or how good and nice you are.
- J. It’s not about earning your way into heaven!
- K. It’s about the attitude of your heart and the inclination of your mind.

L. Jesus makes this clear in what we now refer to as the Great Commandment.

M. *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”* (Mt. 22:37-39)

5. So in Matthew 25 Jesus gives three parables .

A. The first parable is the Ten Virgins. Teaching that we are to be attentive and watchful, the way that the wise Virgins waited for the coming of the bridegroom.

B. The second parable is that of the Talents which basically says, *“God has given you all these things - how have you used them to HIS benefit and glory?”*

C. The third parable - that of the Final Judgement, aka the Separation of the Sheep and Goats” tells us that it’s about the inclination of our heart towards *“the least of*

these my brothers,” the prisoner and immigrant, the sick and alone, the hungry and the poor.

D. Friends, Jesus could have easily added those women who are pregnant and afraid to his list of the *“least of these.”*

E. How are we treating that mother and child?

F. Could there be a more vulnerable, innocent, defenseless creature than a child in his mother’s womb?

6. As individuals and the Church, What is the attitude of our heart and the inclination of our mind?

A. Toward a pregnant woman and the child in her womb?

B. Toward a mother who believes she has to choose between the child and her parents, or the father, or school, or a job or her own fears about being a parent. Believing falsely that she has no options.

C. Toward an elderly man or woman with dementia, or heart disease, or cancer who is now given the “option” of physician assisted

suicide, in many states, which is often given the euphemism “a dignified death.”

- D. Beyond the elderly now the conversation is turning toward the severely disabled and the mentally ill to offer a “dignified death.”
- E. Friends, somehow as a society we have forgotten that all people are “*created in the image of God.*” (Genesis 1:26)
- F. And therefore due every right, protection and dignity from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death, to quote the ACNA Canons.
- G. We have forgotten that each and every human being is “*fearfully and wonderfully made*” as we just prayed in Psalm 139).
- H. We have mistakenly placed ourselves, our desires, our comforts first. Even telling ourselves that WE, after all, are the Least.
- I. And we rationalize away any kernel of doubt or guilt — defiantly saying, “It’s my body, my choice.”
- J. Or, “Well what kind of quality of life would they really have anyway?”

K. Because, of course, we see ourselves, and not God, as the determiners of what “quality of life” means.

L. Now, lest you be discouraged by what I’ve just shared... take heart.. I’m not being cynical — just honest.

7. No as Christians we are never without HOPE.

A. First, and this is important, remember that Our Hope is not in the political process as important as that process is, and as important as it is for us to participate in that process.

B. Our hope is not in the Republican Party or the Democratic Party or the Libertarian Party. Nor is our hope in any elected official.

C. Trust me they will only disappoint you because they, like all us, are fallen creatures in need of a Savior.

D. No, our hope is in Jesus Christ and Him alone. He is the *King of Kings and the Lord of Lords* (Rev. 17:14) and the *Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.* (Rev. 22:13) as the book of Revelations tells us.

- E. He is the one who said, *“Let there be light, and there was light.”* (Genesis 1:3) He was the one who breathed life into Adam's lifeless lungs.
- F. He is the one who offered himself as the “perfect sacrifice for our sins.”
- G. He remains sovereign and WILL have the Last Word!
- H. Now, please don't think that I am advocating some sort of Christian passivity.
- I. Just the opposite, I am arguing for active engagement in this battle on two fronts.
- J. The Spiritual front — remembering that first and foremost this is a battle of *“against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”*
As St. Paul mentions in Ephesians 6:12
- K. So we begin with prayer and fasting.
- L. Friends, our prayers and fasting, as individuals and the Church, have a powerful effect in this battle.
- M. But this is also an earthly battle!
- N. And we as the Church have been commissioned by none less than Jesus Christ himself!
- O. Remember in Matthew 28 when the resurrected Jesus gathered with the disciples and said..

“All authority in heaven and earth have been given me. Go therefore..” (Mt. 28:18)

P. *“Go therefore”* means that we have been given that same Godly authority to act in the Name of God for the protection, aid and comfort of the *“least of these”* as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Q. The Question is.. are we using our God given authority to go forth into the world?

8. So what do we do?

A. The obstacle for far too many of us is that the problems involved in living in a Culture of Death are so big we become paralyzed.

B. We think *“I am just a simple Christian. I’m not in a position of power and authority, what can I do?”*

C. The answer is simple.. live out your Christian life.. seek to fulfill the Great Commandment of Christ that I mentioned before.

D. *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.*

And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. (Matthew 22:37-39)

- E. I know it's super simple right?
- F. How is it that the most simple commandment of Christ is the most difficult to fulfill?
- G. OK, ok keep that as the goal.

9. Thankfully, scripture gives us a straight forward formula —

A. Listen to the words of St. Paul in the opening verse of his letter to the Romans. *“Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,”* (Romans 1:1)

- B. Did you catch the formula?
- C. Servant
- D. Called
- E. Sent

10. Like Paul we are to be servants.

- A. But not just any kind of servant.
- B. The term St. Paul uses here is “Dulos” or bond servant.
- C. Another term could be “indentured servant.”

- D. A bond or indentured servant is one whose debt is so great that they cannot pay it. So they are in the service of another until — they either pay off their debt or receive forgiveness of their debt.
- E. What is the debt that St. Paul owed Jesus?
- F. The same debt that you and I owe him — EVERYTHING.
- G. He paid the price for us on the cross.
- H. He saved us from what we deserve - the Wrath of God.
- I. You want to be Counter Cultural - talk about your debt to Christ in a room full of strangers.
- J. Again this servitude is not a belittling or a forced slavery — it is an attitude of the heart and an inclination of the mind.
- K. With a debt this big, that I ALREADY KNOW IS FORGIVEN, how can I not love Him who loved me first?
- L. Friends I tell you — it is earth shattering and life changing when we realize the depth of our debt to Jesus and the height of His Grace poured out for us.

M. The hymn Amazing Grace just barely touches the surface.

11. We are servants who are CALLED by God!

A. Think about that for a second - the God of the universe has called and equipped YOU for service.

B. God reaches out to us in Word and Sacrament. He reaches out to some through an audible voice, for through a vision, or a dream. OFTEN through the word of a friend or someone in authority in our lives.

C. The best advice I received when I became a bishop came from Bp. Bill Atwood who encouraged me to pray earnestly to the Lord to ask if, whenever I have a baptism, confirmation or ordination, the Lord might give me a word to share with the individual.

D. Talk about taking me outside of my comfort zone.

E. I have taken that advice to heart and it amazes me how often a word or image that the Lord gives me will be right on target.

- F. During COVID I received a call one day from the Philippines.
- G. It was from a woman who told me that years before I confirmed her and I told her that God had given me an image of her working with the poor in a foreign land.
- H. When she told me she laughed when I told her that I immediately knew who she was.
- I. It was early on in my ministry and I wasn't all that confident that what I was sharing with people was a Word from the Lord or the Kung Pao Chicken I ate the night before.
- J. In fact I tell everyone — I'm going to share this but you need to test it and the Lord will let you know if it's from him or my indigestion.
- K. Well Lee laughed and said in a voice much too loud — something akin to — "Oh bishop that's definitely the Kung Pao Chicken - if you knew me you'd know that is not from the Lord."
- L. Well she called to apologize to me. She had been convicted by the Holy Spirit.
- M. It turns out that she was a nurse and a couple of years after she was confirmed she

met and fell in love with a doctor who felt called to serve with Doctors without Borders.

N. She was in the Philippines treating COVID patients and she wanted to call to say she was sorry for laughing at me.

12. St. Paul tells us that he was *“a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle,”* (Romans 1:1)

A. That title Apostle means “One who is sent.”

B. Now for Paul it was also a special title of authority equal to Peter, Andrew, James and the other Apostles whom Jesus had commissioned.

C. But friends we too are given an Apostolic Mission — “Sent out by God” not only to proclaim the Good News of God but to **embody** the Good News of God!

D. Not simply to serve others, especially the Least of These, but to love them.

E. You see, loving them goes beyond service.

F. To love means that you are willing to stand beside, to suffer with, and desire more for the other than for yourself.

- G. Years ago I was sent into the mission field by my bishop who needed Spanish speaking clergy.
- H. I went into missions with this “noble” (I told myself) desire to serve.
- I. Once there I was overcome with a sense of being so lonely and afraid - in a way that I never had before.
- J. But the very people I came to serve Loved me with a Christ-like love.
- K. In doing so I was convicted and converted.
- L. And I loved them in a way I had never loved another.
- M. That love changed my life and shaped my ministry more than three years of seminary ever could.
- N. Brothers and Sisters God is calling us to do the same for others, the Least of These, who are right around you.

CONCLUSION

13. How do we change a Culture of Death?

- A. By being the Christians that Jesus has called us to be.

- B. By heeding the call of Christ and Serving Him as his beloved disciples.
- C. Opening up your home and your heart to receive a child from a mother who made the courageous decision to give birth to her child and who loved him or her enough to give them up for adoption.
- D. Be that adoptive family or support a family who adopts.
- E. To Volunteer at a Pregnancy Care Center to stand with those women who are feeling so frightened and alone.
- F. To walk with those men who are seeking to support the child they have fathered and the mother who bore their child.
- G. To advocate for the life of an unborn child in the public square and in a private home.
- H. To lovingly share with women who have had an abortion that God can forgive them and because he can forgive them, they can forgive themselves.
- I. To sit at the bedside of a dementia patient or cancer patient reminding them that they are not alone and that their life has value.

J. How do we change a Culture of Death?

K. One day at a time, one person at a time loving
the *Least of These my Brothers*.

L. And to that I say - - - AMEN.