

26 1 18 Sanctity of Life

One Word, One Voice

Let's study a little Greek on this fine Sabbath morn. Very little. Just one word:

Brephos. Just one word.

In the first chapter of his gospel, St Luke reports, "And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb . . ." John the Baptist, in his mother's womb, is called *brephos*.

In his second chapter, Luke reveals that an angel appeared to shepherds watching o'er their flocks by night and said, "And this *shall be* a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger."

Christ the Lord was born that day in the city of David. The babe Jesus is called *brephos*.

One word. In the womb or in the manger, a child is *brephos*. The Greek New Testament knows no distinction between the two. No "fetus" inside his mother and "child" outside her. No "fetus" and "babe." No "fetus" and "infant."

One word. *Brephos*.

Beloved, our bishops in the Reformed Episcopal Church, past and present, have mandated that each parish hear a sermon on the sanctity of life on or near the anniversary of the Supreme Court's horrific decision in *Roe v Wade* in 1973.

This is that sermon. I could not be more eager to comply with their instruction.

Much has changed since the court's *Dobbs v Jackson Women's Health Organization* ruling in 2022. Federal funding has dried up. Almost 50 Planned Parenthood facilities closed last year. The largest in the Western Hemisphere, just up the Gulf Freeway from where you sit, has gone dark. Blessedly dark.

What has not changed is that wide swaths of the population have the same access to abortion as before. In states with restrictions, the abortion pill does the dirty work. Planned Parenthood continues to solicit funds. Their appeals pop up routinely on my computer screen.

The first American pope in the 2,000-year history of the Roman Catholic Church, Leo XIV, is an alumnus of Villanova University, a Catholic institution. Students for Life in America surveyed church-connected colleges and universities and found 114 of them support abortion in some way. Villanova listed several abortion organizations on its career connection website. It got an F.

The Supreme Court, in deciding abortion is not a constitutional right, lateralized the matter to the states. In some states, abortion killings have accelerated. Minnesota just recorded a three-decade high. In Kansas, the count jumped 186 percent.

Abortion remains the leading cause of death in our nation.

Worldometers tracks the ghastly toll. Relying on statistics from the World Health Organization, it puts the number at 73 million deaths annually worldwide.

Our enemy does not sleep. He may play possum, he may stage a tactical retreat. But he will never relent. The synagogue of Satan is open for its shameful business day and night, year in and year out.

When the night is far spent, when we are deep in our slumbers, Satan strikes.

The father of lies is cultivating a new generation of true unbelievers at this moment. A new book for kids, *Abortion Is Everything*, targets even kindergartners. The official book description proudly proclaims:

“Abortion Is Everything speaks directly to five to eight-year-olds about what abortion is, how it might feel, and why people have abortions. With accessible, inclusive language, *Abortion Is Everything* frames abortion as the actualization of a uniquely human superpower: our capacity to imagine the future and make choices that lead us towards the life we envision.

“Abortion is a tool that allows human beings to shape our destinies, and which has shaped the entire world around us.”

Five- to eight-year-olds.

Even now, regardless of what laws are on the books, the devil is making us poorer. Yes, poorer.

Mother Teresa cast her haunted gaze over the wretched poverty of the steaming slums of Calcutta. Then she called out the world’s greatest poverty. “It is a poverty,” she said, “to decide that a child must die so that you may live as you wish.”

Speaking to U.S. government officials, she fleshed out that statement:

“By abortion, the mother does not learn to love, but kills even her own child to solve her problems . . . Any country that accepts abortion is not teaching its people to love, but to use any violence to get what they want. This is why the greatest destroyer of love and peace is abortion.”

Our enemy, we may trust, cackles when he surveys our decaying nation. In less than a century, our sexual ethics has been plunged deep into the gutter, where it remains to this day. No-fault divorce tears families apart. This plague has infected churchgoers at the same rate as the population overall.

Cheap and easy access to birth control has turned sex into a sport. In the minds of millions, sex and procreation stand as far apart as east is from west.

I am not decrying sex. I am condemning the cartoon we have made of it.

Join me in a few lines from Anglicans for Life’s litany for abortion. Your antiphon is, “Forgive us, O Lord.”

For the misuse of the gift of our sexual nature,
Forgive us, O Lord.

For not honoring children as a gift from you, created in your image,
Forgive us, O Lord.

For separating in heart and mind the birth of a child and the sexual union of man and wife,

Forgive us, O Lord.

St Paul pondered the sexual nature God has implanted in us and wrote this verse to the Corinthians: “But if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.”

The church decontaminated sex by inventing marriage. Properly understood, sex begat image-bearers and facilitated God’s purpose of filling His creation with worshippers. Our culture – and of course we’re hardly alone in this – in emptying the sexual act of its divine purpose of fostering God’s glory has made it void of any meaning beyond itself. It’s sex for the sake of sex.

Nature cries out with the pangs of birth. Flora and fauna, birds and bees, reproduce in the act of joining together. The heavens sing as the earth renews itself again and anew. In marital bliss, in the conjugal act, two become one while remaining two . . . and a third emerges.

In the womb and in the manger, one word, *brephos*. In scripture and in nature, in word and in world, one voice. They ring out the message in perfect harmony. One word, one voice. Every Christmas, Jesus Christ is born again in the hearts of all who are born again.

To preserve a rationale that denies God as Creator of all life and as Sculptor of nature, our culture tortures logic into a pretzel and stomps on it in the mud. Of our 50 states, 30 make the killing of a woman in any stage of pregnancy a double murder. Eight others make it so in some stage.

Yet abortion, they say, is not the act of killing a person. Our culture lurches about as though drunk in a script authored by the Mad Hatter. Is this a satanic joke?

A friend posted a question – What is life? – and the purported answers of prominent figures down through the ages.

Does my life have purpose and meaning? Is my life, bound for glory, crowned with dignity in the here and now?

What is life?

- Dostoevsky : This is hell.
- Socrates: This is a test.
- Aristotle: It's the mind.
- Nietzsche: This is power.
- Freud: It is death.
- Marco: That's the idea.
- Picasso: This is art.
- Gandhi: This is love.
- Schopenhauer: This is suffering.
- Einstein: This is knowledge.

For the Christian, life is neither idea nor knowledge, neither psychology nor philosophy. Life is not a concept but a Person, Jesus Christ. From conception unto eternity, our life is inextricably entwined with His.

We are images of God and as the Son reflects the Father, so too we now reflect the Son because we bear His Spirit. (Romans 8:16). We are redeemed for a purpose and that precious purpose is bearing God's image.

In the fifteenth chapter of his gospel, St John records these words of Jesus: "I am the vine, ye *are* the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing." Nothing.

In the incarnation, God revealed Himself to us. In the incarnation, God also revealed us to us. Yes, our lives have purpose and dignity. We are not mere husks of flesh. To be conceived and born is to become an image-bearer. To be born again is to become an heir, a brother of Christ, an adopted child of God.

We are who we are because He is who He is.

Putting on flesh, He made Himself one of us. So doing, He made us like Him. Weeping with those who weep, mourning with those who mourn, He who is fully God made Himself fully man from womb to tomb.

When He by His Spirit bestows upon us the second birth, He beckons us into communion with Him. We celebrate this communion, this joining of flesh to flesh, each Sabbath day.

He is omnipotent. God divides. He divides the waters above from the waters below, the wheat from the tares, the sheep from the goats. God divides.

God unites. He unites Jew and Greek, man and wife, mother and child. When God unites, He creates a bond that man may not put asunder. This is not naked biology. Have you heard of a mother's touch? Have your children? Your grandchildren?

It is not within the purview of sin-soaked man to pre-empt, to overrule, the dictates of a holy God. Can the clay rebuke the potter?

The grass withers, the flower fades. Time and tide ebb and flow; sun and moon wax and wane. God's celebration of life endures forever.

One word. One voice. Amen.

The Reverend Edward W Fowler