

Sermon for Jan 28, 2018 – “Sacred. Precious”

4th Sunday After Epiphany, Year B – Texts: Gen.1:26-31; Deut 30:15-20
Sanctity of Life Sunday (January 22)

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Life is sacred. Life is precious. Our first reading reminds us that Life is created by God. Throughout Scripture we're reminded that Life is valued and protected by God. Speaking through the prophets, God reminds us that although we might feel otherwise we have not and we will not ever be forsaken. Quite the contrary. We have been inscribed on the palms of God's hands. We are loved with an everlasting love.

Life is sacred. Life is precious. No matter what its condition might be. Life is a challenge in a sin-tainted, broken world. But, we mustn't overlook those who have challenges in this life. Indeed, we're called to care for others regardless of circumstances, regardless of the challenges. Jesus showed special concern for people. All people certainly, but especially the poor, the lame, the blind, lepers. Today, we consider those facing challenges of life:

- The teenager confronted with an unplanned pregnancy
- The woman learning that her baby could be born with a defect.
- The man who ignores his responsibility to that woman.
- The terminally ill or aged who've been forgotten.
- Those who've outlived many of their family and friends.
- The disabled and the disadvantaged.
- The lonely and emotionally distraught

We **cannot** simply discard them. We **must** never forget them. As Jesus said, **“Truly I tell you...just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of My family, you did it to Me.”**

In his book, “The Applause of Heaven,” pastor and author Max Lucado tells about a sweater that hangs in his closet. He never wears it. It's too small and buttons are missing. He wonders shouldn't he just toss it out? Why keep it? He won't ever wear it again. Besides, it's taking up valuable closet space. Of course, he should get rid of it. At least, that's what **logic** says. But love, Lucado writes, won't let him. Why not? What's so special about that sweater? It's special because it was made by a mother expressing her love. **His** mother. And that what makes the sweater special. That's what makes it unique. Irreplaceable. So, while maybe the sweater's lost its **use**, it's lost none of its **value**. It's valuable not because of its **function** but because of its **maker**. Thus, it is with each and every life.

To understand this, we need look no further than our first reading which tells us that we're created in God's image, that of all creation, God refers to human beings alone as ‘very good.’ We are, as the psalmist says, “fearfully and wonderfully made.” And so, we realize that God places great value on those whom society has shuffled aside. This is part of God's purpose, God's ways, which Isaiah tells us are so much higher than ours. And so there are times when a person's value or function isn't readily apparent to us. This is often because we rarely know the full story. We seldom learn how things turn out or the effect that one life has on another.

I offer this illustration: A doctor tells the story of a fragile young woman who was expecting her first baby, a baby girl. It was discovered that the baby was in a breech position, which carries a high mortality rate. During delivery all was well at first, but the doctor soon learned that the baby's entire thigh from hip to knee was missing. He considered how this would affect the mother. He imagined the family going broke paying for doctors and treatments. He imagined a sad and lonely life for the girl as she grew up handicapped. For a moment he considered doing what most would consider unthinkable. No one would ever know, he thought. The family would probably be relieved. But he couldn't do it. He delivered the baby. He deeply regretted it. As the years went on, the doctor blamed himself for not having had the strength to "do the right thing." Many years later, at a hospital Christmas party, three lovely young musicians had been hired to play. The doctor was especially fascinated by the extraordinary young harpist. Shortly after that, a woman approached him to tell him that the harpist was her daughter. She told the doctor that this was the little girl who'd been born with only one good leg seventeen years ago, the little girl he'd regretted delivering. She told the doctor that they'd tried everything at first but now her daughter had an artificial leg and, best of all, she's learned to use her hands so wonderfully. Her daughter is going to be one of the world's greatest harpists and is so very happy with her life. As they were talking, the girl had quietly approached the doctor and her mother. Impulsively, the doctor took the girl and hugged her finally finding the peace he'd lived without for so long.

Another breach baby was born with a broken arm to an unwed mother in a Salvation Army hospital 56 years ago. Placed for adoption, the boy eventually became a minister. He's currently serving a congregation in a church in Cincinnati.

Life is sacred. Life is precious. As I've come to see it our peace comes from recognizing that we reflect God's image and from allowing God to achieve His purpose through our lives and the lives of others. As we lose sight of the value of human life, we become susceptible to the temptation to destroy it. When that happens, we lose the impact of a life that could have enriched our lives and brought glory to God.

The classic movie, "It's A Wonderful Life," allows George Bailey to see what the world would have missed if he'd never been born. Would a similar experience help us value our lives, all life, more? I suspect it would.

A college professor challenges his ethics class by asking: "A man has syphilis. His wife, tuberculosis. They have four children. One has died, and the rest have terminal illnesses. The mother is pregnant again. What should the man do?" The class voted to terminate the pregnancy. The professor said, "Congratulations, you've just killed Beethoven."

Life is sacred. Life is precious. Life is a trust from God. It should, therefore, be dedicated and lived for one thing...to achieve God's divine purpose. Our lives should be offered as an act of worship to our Creator. Life is a sacred trust. And, like a piece of art or music crafted for a specific purpose, we find that life is **indeed** sacred especially when we allow our lives to be given to serve the purposes of our Creator God. We are created to live. We are consecrated for life. God gives life. We give God our lives in response to His call to be used for God's purpose.

Pastoring a church near Toronto, Canada, Henri Nouwen was asked to help care for Adam Arnett, a man with a severe disability. The book "Adam, God's Beloved," describes how Nouwen went about doing this, about how Adam became Nouwen's friend, teacher and guide. Nouwen wrote about this relationship, because he realized "...that this very disabled human being was loved by God from all eternity and sent into the world with a unique mission of healing."

If we understand that life is sacred, that we're created to live and called to consecrate our lives to God's purpose then we'll be able to truly celebrate life! And, when that happens, it will have a profound effect on the ministry of our church and how we take care of one another. Life is sacred. Life is precious.

One final illustration: A well-known speaker started off a seminar by holding up a hundred-dollar bill. He asked the room of 500 people "Who'd like this \$100 bill?" Immediately, most people's hands went up. The man said, "I'm going to give the \$100 to one of you but first, let me do this." He proceeded to crumple the bill up. He then asked, "Anyone want it?" Again, lots of hands. "Well," he replied, "what if I do this?" And he dropped it on the ground and began to grind it into the floor with his shoe. He picked it back up, now crumpled and dirty. "Now who still wants it?" Same response. "Friends," he said, "you've all learned a very valuable lesson. No matter what I did to the money, you still wanted it because it did not decrease in value one cent. It was still worth \$100 regardless of what had happened to it. Many times, in our own lives," he said, "we're dropped, crumpled, and ground into the dirt either by choice, chance or circumstance. We feel as though we're worthless. But, no matter what **has** happened, or what **will** happen we will **never** lose our value in God's eyes. Because to God we are priceless." Brothers and sisters, here's the thing. We are. We **are** priceless. We **are** sacred. We **are** precious. Let us regard one another as such. Let us not lose our value in one another's eyes. Let us choose life. Let us love the Lord our God obeying Him and holding fast to Him. Let us give thanks to God for the gift of life!

Amen and amen.