

Sanctity of Human Life Sunday

A Sermon Suggestion

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Jeremiah 1:4, “Before I Formed You in the Womb”

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you” (Jer. 1:4).

I. BEFORE GOD FORMED JEREMIAH, HE KNEW HIM.

Jeremiah didn't *ask* to be a prophet. Jeremiah didn't *want* to be a prophet. Jeremiah knew very well that he wasn't *qualified* to be a prophet. But God made him a prophet anyway. God told Jeremiah, “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you.” And that was true. Before Jeremiah was conceived, God knew all about Jeremiah's life.

God knew that Jeremiah was going to preach during Judah's most troubled times. God knew that little nations like Judah (where Jeremiah lived) were nothing but pawns in a never-ending power struggle between the world's superpowers, Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon. And God knew that Jeremiah would lose the one person in power on whom Jeremiah could rely — that was King Josiah, who died on the battlefield in the midst of one of those power struggles. In a time before word processors or printing presses, in a time when books were written by hand and there weren't *copies* of books—only the originals—God knew that a hateful king would take the book that was Jeremiah's life work, rip it to shreds, and throw it piece-by-piece into the fire. God knew how much Jeremiah would suffer for saying what God sent him to say. God knew that Jeremiah would be jailed, persecuted, and nearly put to death by the very people who should have been protecting him. Before he formed him in his mother's womb, God knew how hard life would be for Jeremiah.

But God also knew how he would carry Jeremiah through all those troubles. He knew that Jeremiah would serve his Lord on earth with suffering but then rejoice with his Lord in heavenly joy. “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you,” God told Jeremiah. And God did know Jeremiah. God had a gracious, loving plan for Jeremiah. And I will guarantee you that, however hard life on earth might have been for him, right now Jeremiah is eternally grateful for what God allowed him to go through.

II. BEFORE THE FATHER FORMED JESUS, HE KNEW HIM

“Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you.” Those words that the Father spoke to Jeremiah also apply to Jesus. Before Jesus was born, God the Father also had a gracious, loving plan for him; He didn’t wait until his Son was hanging on the cross and then say, “Hey, I might be able to do something saving with that death.” The Father had the crucifixion all planned out in advance. Before he was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary, the Father knew Jesus.

He knew that, just like Jeremiah, Jesus would get into trouble for speaking the Lord’s Word. The Father knew the people in Jesus’ hometown would try to throw him off a cliff, so they could stone him. He knew Jesus would walk right through their midst unharmed. But the Father also knew that the most important people of the time would keep scheming to kill his Son — and eventually, in *His* own time, they would succeed. The Father knew that Jesus would never have a real home after he started his ministry; He knew that Jesus’ friends would desert Him just when He needed them the most; and the Father knew that his Son would be mocked and flogged and finally crucified.

But God the Father also knew that Jesus’ death was the way He would keep us sinners from having to spend all eternity in hell. He knew that Jesus would take our sin, take our guilt, take our death, and give us His life. God the Father knew that his Son had for you and me a love that is patient and kind, not boastful or arrogant or self-seeking. He knew that Jesus would show us a love that is wider, longer, higher, and deeper than any love we could experience from anyone else in this universe. The Father knew his love would be as wide as humanity, as long as eternity, as high as heaven, and as deep as our need. That’s the love the Father has lavished on us because of Jesus.

God had it all planned out. “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you.” Those words to Jeremiah might well have been spoken to Jesus. And they might well have been spoken to you, too.

III. BEFORE GOD FORMED YOU, HE KNEW YOU

God isn’t stupid. He knew before you were born that you were going to be one more horrible sinner added to a human race that already was totally corrupt. God knew before I was born that I would be one more horrible sinner added to a human race that already was totally corrupt. God had every reason to give up on us, to wash his hands of all humanity, to simply scrap this world that he created so well and we messed up so badly. But instead of aborting us worthless people, he decided to adopt us.

Before you were born, before you were even conceived, God knew exactly how he was going to bring you to faith. Maybe it was when he adopted you by water and his Word at the font. Or maybe someone told you that Jesus died for your sins. Maybe you don’t even remember when you first came to faith. It doesn’t matter. God remembers. He had it all planned out. Before your parents ever laid eyes on each other, before your grandparents had ever heard of each other, God knew how he was going to make you his child. And

now God has made you his child.

His love is absolutely amazing. The last hymn we'll sing during communion marvels at the love that God has lavished on us: "Predestined by the Father, / Adopted by his will, / Redeemed by Christ the Savior, / His purpose to fulfill. / . . . For we were lost and homeless / And helpless in our sin / Till God himself through Jesus / Reached down and took us in." God loves you so deeply that he had your salvation planned before you were a twinkle in your father's eye!

IV. BEFORE GOD FORMS ANY CHILD, HE KNOWS HER OR HIM

"Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you." Those words to Jeremiah not only could have been spoken to Jesus and to you, they could be spoken to every child who has ever been conceived. God has a plan for every child he has ever formed in the womb.

Sometimes we think of abortion as a political issue that has no place in the pulpit. And if abortion were purely a political issue, it *would* have no place in the pulpit. But God's Word has something to say about abortion. Abortion may be legal in American courts, but it is certainly not acceptable in God's courts. Forty years ago this past week, on January 22, 1973, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that unborn children are not persons "in the whole sense." Not persons in the whole sense? That's essentially what the Supreme Court said about African Americans in the Dred Scott decision a century-and-a-half ago—that they aren't persons in the same sense as white folks. That's essentially what Adolph Hitler said about Jewish people—that they aren't persons in the same sense that Aryans are.

Peter Singer teaches bioethics at Princeton University. He argues that for at least the first month after their children are born, parents should be able to put to death any child who is born with any kind of "defect." If you accept the Supreme Court's argument that we humans can set an arbitrary time when a child becomes a whole person, Mr. Singer's argument makes perfect sense logically. If we can decide that whole personhood doesn't begin until after, say, the first trimester in the womb, why can't we argue that whole personhood doesn't begin until after the first month out of the womb? Or the first year out of the womb? Or the first ten years? Why don't we just kill whomever we wish? If we're going to ignore God some of the time, we may as well ignore him all the time.

In Roman society during the first few centuries after Jesus, if a father didn't want his baby, he simply threw that child on the trash heap outside the city. That's what happens to one baby in the United States every twenty-two seconds — she or he ends up on the trash heap outside an abortion clinic. One baby every twenty-two seconds. That's more than 50 babies just while I'm preaching this sermon! By the way, not all of those children discarded in Roman trash died. Much to the consternation of the parents who tossed out their offspring, Christians would arrive at night, rescue those little children, and care for them. Those Christians knew first-hand about being adopted when you expect to die. We Christians know first-hand about being adopted when we should expect to die, too. God has adopted us. And Jesus gave up his life to make it possible! That's why we Christians

can't just watch callously as one to two million babies a year — *one to two million babies a year* — are killed in the United States before they are born.

Folks talk about the “right to choose.” We need to ask very specifically, “The right to choose *what?*” What is being defended is the right to choose to kill a life that God formed in the womb. We aren't comfortable saying it — I'm not comfortable saying it — but it's the truth: what is being defended is the right to choose *murder*. Abortion is murder. Except on those rare occasions when the life of the mother is at stake — and then we can't say the child's life is more valuable to God than the mother's nor that the mother's life is more valuable than the child's — abortion simply is not an option.

Some people say that it isn't right to bring a child into the world when you know from the start that the child's life is going to be troubled. Well, Jeremiah's life was troubled from the start. And nobody had a life more troubled from beginning to end than Jesus. But the Lord who formed them in the womb used them to do mighty things in this world. Abortion was common in the first century. We'd be in a sorry state if Mary had chosen that supposedly easy way out.

Every once in a while you hear the slogan, “Every child a wanted child,” suggesting that we want to make sure no child comes into this world unwanted. Well, no child does come into this world unwanted. A lot of us Christians want that child and are willing to care for that child. But even if there weren't a single Christian who wanted that child, God wants that child. The one who formed that child in the womb wants her or him so badly that he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross, just so he could have that child — and all the rest of us sinners.

Our Lord's love for us didn't stand idly by when we were dying helplessly in sin. We cannot stand idly by when babies are dying helplessly in abortion. Our Lord's love has come to us. Now our Lord's love reaches those unborn children through us. And our Lord's love reaches the parents of those unborn children through us. Yes, God loves parents who are considering abortion — and parents who have already carried out an abortion — as much as he loves their children. And you and I who have been loved so incredibly by God are the ones who get to give his love to those who need it.

That doesn't mean we will all show our love in the same way. There are so many different ways for our love to reach out to unborn children and their parents. You can use your vote to elect people who will change our laws. You can use your voice to speak for those who can't speak for themselves. You can participate in rallies. You can contribute to a crisis pregnancy center. There's a flyer about New Beginnings Crisis Pregnancy Center in today's bulletin. One of our members volunteers there. There was a flyer in your bulletin last Sunday about Lutherans for Life. And there are extras in the narthex this morning. You could join Lutherans for Life as several of our members have done. They have a meeting this Tuesday at Zion in Belleville.

Next Sunday's bulletin will include information about adoption. You can listen and care when someone is in a situation where they might consider abortion. You can be the

person who assures a frightened mother that adoption is a loving choice that gives her child a chance — a chance to be baptized by our loving Lord and a chance to be cared for by parents who dearly want to give their love to a little child. There are three families in this congregation who can tell you all about the joys of adoption. Maybe you won't adopt yourself, but you'll help make sure that all the costs are covered for a birth mother who lovingly entrusts her child to adoptive parents.

Maybe you'll work to help people understand why abortion isn't just sinful; it's bad for our society. It fosters a culture of death instead of a love for life. You can support groups like the Vitae Society that put that message out in the media. But as important as anything else we Christians do to defend life, we can proclaim the Gospel. You and I get to tell people about the life given to us by Jesus, about his love that, as today's Epistle says, "never ends." In the end, that's the message that's going to change hearts and attitudes about abortion. After all, it's the message that changed us from being doomed sinners to being adopted children of God!

God's words to Jeremiah are the Father's words to Jesus, to you, and to every child ever conceived: "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you."

Amen.