

## Sanctity of Human Life Sunday

A Sermon Suggestion

Text: John 17:3

Grace, mercy, peace, from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen!

Jesus said, **“Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent”** (St. John 17:3, NIV).

*Life*, it seems like such a simple four-letter word. *Life*, a word like many others that has lost its substance, its nuance, its meaning. *Life*, it seems in some cases, has become more of a burden than a joyful celebration, more of an obstacle to experience than a beautiful, inestimable, gift from God. *Life*, think about it, the incredible complexities, the inexplicable and harmonious inner workings of an almost infinite number of constituent living and breathing organic components. *Life* is swma and yuch, body and soul. But life goes far beyond that dichotomy.

Life has been defined as *“The quality or character distinguishing an animal or plant from inorganic or from dead organic bodies, which is especially manifest by metabolism, growth, reproduction, and internal powers of adaptation to environment.”*

Life has been defined as *“a vital...physical or spiritual force,” “the presence of a series of experiences, of body and mind...from birth to death,” “a vital or living being, especially a person.”*

A noted theologian made an astute observation about life. It goes something like this. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with the so-called Enlightenment came the magnanimous revelation of man’s genius and newly announced autonomy from God. Sounds frightfully like the deception of Satan in the Garden, doesn’t it? *“We don’t need a ‘god’ since man has come of age and understands (anagnwskw) all things through science and rational reason. God is simply a crutch for the unlearned, for the unenlightened.”*

With the advent of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Bible was discarded as the final authority and fount of truth and faith. After all, it was asserted, it is literature, and as literature it is a fanciful and fantastic historical, geographical, scientific, and spiritual work of fiction. It speaks of a God and His Christ who supposedly came to save a world dead in sin, whatever that means. Let’s face it, everything is relative, life is whatever you make it out to be. If something is good and right in your own eyes it logically follows that it is therefore very good.

Then comes the 20<sup>th</sup> century. When you throw God out, when you discard God's Word as some genre of preposterous mythology, when you in essence kill the "author of life," life itself is put to death. With the 20<sup>th</sup> century came the most blatant, brutal, and prolific disregard for human life and carnage on a worldwide scale never before experienced. Life became meaningless, nonsensical, and optional. Life has become for "people in the zone," or "on the razor's edge" something to cheat just to get an adrenaline high.

The Greek *zwh* or "life" has great significance in the Old Testament. Life is the presupposition of all good and all striving, which cannot be relativised. The word "life" is often used for fortune because of its intrinsic value. Qoheleth 9:4 says, "*A living dog is always better than a dead lion.*" Life is of special grace when a man or woman lives to a ripe old age and dies full of years.

Genesis 2:7 very clearly attributes the gift of life to almighty God Himself when He created Adam from the red clay of the earth and breathed the very source of life into his nostrils and subsequently created woman from the man. Yet life is two-pronged. First, life is a gift from God and we are the recipients of great enjoyment that comes from all of the blessings He bestows upon us in this life. Second, life is the certain and unshakable joy He gives us as gift through the faith He works in us by His Word and Spirit. The gift of faith and righteousness we have in God's only begotten Son.

*Zwh* in the New Testament is first used as the natural life of man. *Zwh* is also quickly linked to its opposite *qanatos* (the natural phenomenon of death) and as quickly to *swthria* (salvation). So often when Jesus delivers those in bondage to sin and death the words life, healing, and salvation used. And we can go a step further to speak of *aiwnios zhn*, life everlasting or eternal life.

This life is not only a gift of almighty God, in the here and now sense, but also and necessarily includes our future life. A blessed and eternal life that is grounded in and finds its source in the Easter kerygma that pronounces the glorious resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. He who was dead now lives and He extends that gracious act of salvation to all without which we should all be lost. Jesus is the "**author of life**" (Acts 3:15), "**the resurrection and the life**" (John 11:25), "**the truth and the life**" (John 14:6). As John says, "**We also know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true — even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is true God and eternal life**" (1 John 6:20).

In all of this there is an incredibly fluid connection. God is the author of life. He is the Giver of forgiveness, salvation, and life everlasting. We are all part of God's creation. We are all unique, special, and beloved children of God in the broad sense because of His creative Word in the Creation account in Genesis where He has created all good things and has given us the gift of procreation (whether viewed as creationism or transducianism).

In all of this there is sonship. For we are heirs of the riches of God's grace in Christ and

the forgiveness and everlasting life that is found only in His crucifixion and resurrection. Eternal gifts apprehended by the gift of faith (*fides actualis; fides cordis*). We have been rescued from the devil, given the gift of the Holy Spirit, forgiven our sins, and made His sons and daughters when the blood of Christ was splashed on our heads and hearts in the Name of our Triune God in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. And we remember that each and every time we make the sign of the cross. We remember our baptismal birthday as a day of celebration, the day we were made alive in Christ and began to grow before God in true faith and live a life of good works. This is gift, this is immeasurable grace, this is true life in Christ.

The excursus of the first article of the Apostle's Creed puts all of this into a proper perspective. *"I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes and ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them....All this He does out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me. For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him."*

We are to love our neighbor as ourselves. Our neighbor is our wife, husband, and children; the man or woman across the street; the elderly man or woman next door; the child in the womb, yes even our enemies. Scripture says that we are to be good stewards of God's gifts. We are to help the downtrodden, the orphaned, and the widowed. We are not to judge. Our response in Christian love is to care for all of God's creation.

Our response is the privilege we have to serve his creation through advocacy, speaking up for those who cannot speak, caring for the physical and spiritual needs of those in crisis situations and proclaiming God's grace. Our response as the Church is the only real message of hope and forgiveness in the midst of sin. The response of the Church is the forgiveness, life, and salvation that comes only in Christ, the author of real life.

The bottom line in all of this is Law and Gospel. God gives life. God numbers our days and takes life according to His will. God will rightly judge the living and the dead on the Last Day. As human beings we are not permitted to take life, to murder, to intentionally deprive someone of the breath of life that God gives as gift. We cannot take that gift away of our own accord. Certainly there are the thorny issues of quality of life and bio-ethics. These are not easy issues to deal with or thoroughly understand. Certainly there are the issues of life and death and the authority God has given the Kingdom of the Left to engage in just wars and punish evil doers in order to alleviate manifest chaos and protect the innocent.

But to wantonly and intentionally and with malice aforethought to deprive someone of the gift of life, whether the unborn, the elderly, or the physically or mentally challenged is unconscionable and a violation of the Fifth Commandment, **"You shall not murder."**

This is not marketing or a slogan issue. This is not propaganda or a "bandwagon" issue. This issue goes far beyond an "anti-this, anti-that, pro whatever" billboard or placard. The issue of the destruction of the innocent goes beyond assuaging it as a political or

social right or just a “moral issue.” It is a reality that deeply affects the spiritual health of millions of people, not for a week, a month, even a year, but for the rest of their lives. It is a reality that affects relationships, families, and extended families and leaves scars that often never heal.

Sin is sin and the wages of sin is eternal and spiritual death. Who are we to argue with God’s Word and His righteous judgment. But we cannot leave it here with the Law. God in Christ Jesus is gracious, merciful, and loving. For through His Law He convicts of us our wrongdoing. Through His Word and Spirit He brings us to contrition, sorrow for our sin. He brings us to confession, we agree that we have sinned against Him in thought, word, and deed. He brings us to repentance, we by His power desire to amend our lives toward righteousness.

He brings us to the healing balm and fullness of the Gospel. That in Christ Jesus there is the wonderful gift of absolution, the forgiveness of sin. That for the sake of His cross and the assurance of salvation and everlasting life we have in His resurrection, we receive the forgiveness of our transgressions. We receive the release of our debt and the gift of freedom and life through the grace of the author of life, Jesus Christ our Lord. Thanks be to God! For mercy, for forgiveness, for life, and for life everlasting!

**“To Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God and Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen!” (Jude 24-25, NIV).**