

# Sermon

## Sunday, January 20, 2019

Charleston, SC

10:30 am Chapel & 6 :00 pm Sermon ~ Exodus 12:1-7, 11-14, Matthew 2:13-18

*Weeping with Rachel*

The Rev. David Booman

Well, today's gospel passage from Matthew is one of the most disturbing passages in scripture, the slaughter of the innocents in Bethlehem. You know the story: the wise men tell King Herod of the Savior's birth, and he with all the cunning paranoia of a sociopath, orders the liquidation of all the male children under two.

This story is actually in keeping with what we know of Herod's personality. Historians tell us he also executed his wife, his mother-in-law, his brother-in-law, and three of his own sons. It's like something out of the Godfather. Again, one of the most disturbing passages in scripture.

It's so disturbing that many churches actually leave this out of their Sunday lectionary. They just skip over these 5 verses like they never happened. And yet, Paul writes, 'ALL scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, reproof, and training in righteousness.' And so it's important for us to face passages like this.

One of the things we have to face is the *question*—why do we find it so disturbing? And I want to suggest, *it can't simply be the violence, per se*. You know, this week I was on youtube and randomly clicked on a video about jaguars. The cat, not the car. It was a National Geographic sort of thing. It peaked my curiosity. So I clicked on it, and proceeded to watch jaguars just *destroy* a whole host of animals, including one jaguar who wiped out an entire family of warthogs. The video has 36 million views.

So it can't be the violence that's disturbing. People LOVE National Geographic. But there's something about violence done to *people*, especially *innocent* people, that makes us not want to look at it. We ignore it. We 'don't go there.' It's like during the holocaust. People were living near the death camps. And as the ashes from the ovens rained down upon them, they didn't

allow themselves to think about what it meant. Because it would be too disturbing.

Why do we struggle with these things? I believe it's because God has given us a moral intuition and we know, deep down, that human beings, made in the image of God, are incredibly precious, and violence done to them is a tragedy.

And of course we see this loud and clear in the Bible, the preciousness of life. In Genesis 1 God creates the world and He says 'It's good.' But *then* God creates human beings and we read it is 'very good.'

So today is Sanctity of Life Sunday. Today we recognize that human life is sacred. This weekend a 100,000 people marched on Washington DC, including many of our Anglican bishops and priests. And they're essentially marching to say, 'Human life is *very good*.' No matter how old or young you are. As Dr. Seuss noted in Horton Hears a Who, '*A persons a person, no matter how small.*'

And I also want to be crystal clear, this is NOT primarily a political issue. It is a moral issue. God himself spoke about the moral implications of the unborn 3000 years before the founding of our nation. And so while politicians may try to use this issue for their political agendas, it is *fundamentally*, moral and spiritual in nature.

And we see this in scripture. In Psalm 139 David sings, 'O Lord, you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.' In Jeremiah 1 God says to Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.' In Luke Chapter 2 we see that John the Baptist, still in his mother's womb, is named by God, called by God, and filled with the Holy Spirit, before he is even born.

And more and more we're also seeing the preciousness of life through

science as well. You know, at 12 weeks, still in the first trimester—when the Baby is the size of a lime and your wife is still throwing up—we see babies sucking their thumbs. Responding to touch. Responding to pain. The heart is pumping, the liver is making blood cells, the kidneys are clearing fluid. They have their own unique fingerprints. All at 12 weeks. Yes, life is beautiful and precious.

OK, but how about disabled life or handicapped life, is that still precious? You know, my wife and I are expecting our third child in May. And every time she's been pregnant the doctor asks us if we'd like to do genetic testing. In case the baby has Down Syndrome or some other genetic disorder. And one of the reasons is so that IF there are abnormalities we can extinguish the pregnancy. But we always say, 'No thanks. We don't need the testing. Our baby is precious no matter what.'

Unfortunately we live in a world that increasingly says, 'Your life is precious only if you are healthy and self-sufficient and hit a bunch of other arbitrary criteria.' And so there's a war going on targeting the poorest of the poor and the weakest of the weak, the handicapped and disabled. The nation of Iceland announced in 2017 that they had virtually eradicated the birth of Down Syndrome babies.

This is Augusta Ingadotter, one of the last Down Syndrome babies born in Iceland.

And yet in a survey published in the *American Journal of Medical Genetics*, researchers asked different people questions about their happiness and well-being. For one group the statistics were astonishing. 99% of those surveyed in this group said they were happy with their lives. 97% answered 'yes' to the question, 'Do you like who you are?' 99% agreed with the statement, 'Do you love your family.'

Who are these happiest people on earth? *People living with Down Syndrome*. And yet if the trends continue, they will soon be virtually extinct in many Western countries. And all because WE know better and can say, 'Your life is not worth living.'

OK, how about more extreme disabilities? How about people born, say, without arms and legs? Is their life worth living?

I'd like to introduce you to Nick Voyachik. He was born without any arms or legs. His dad threw up when he saw his son for the first time. His mom refused to hold him. Nick was tormented by bullies for years. He attempted to kill himself by drowning when he was 8 years old.

But by the grace of God, Nick found meaning and purpose in spite of his handicap. Today Nick is able to swim, surf, and skydive, he's the president of two companies, is happily married with four children, and now speaks to millions of people around the world, about the hope that is found in Jesus Christ.

And so my friends, how do we respond to these truths? How then should we live? How should we uphold the preciousness of life? I'd offer two things. We should repent and we should respond.

First, we should repent. For how we as the church have failed to stand for the weak and the vulnerable.

Bernard Nathanson was medical doctor who helped pass Roe v Wade. He terminated over 60,000 pregnancies. He once said, 'We would never have gotten away with what we did if the church had been united, purposeful, and strong.'

And so when we as the church, address these issues, we should always approach them, not with judgment and condemnation, but with humility and repentance, aware of how *we* ourselves have failed. As a church, we have *not* been a voice for the voiceless.

But also because many of us have personally contributed to the culture of death we should also repent of our personal sins. Perhaps we've pressured someone into terminating a pregnancy, or we've driven them to the clinic, or we've given ungodly advice, or we've *even* taken the life of our own child. Whatever the sin, we need to repent.

Because the Good News is there's always forgiveness. You can't out-sin the grace of God. There's a Wideness in God's mercy that is wider than the sea. There is

ALWAYS forgiveness for those who turn from their sins and run to Jesus.

Just think of Moses, David, and the Apostle Paul. What did they have in common? They were all murderers. The greatest prophet, the greatest king, the greatest apostle...had innocent blood on their hands. And yet God sent his Son into the world not to condemn the world, but so that the world might be saved through Him. And Jesus Christ loves murderers, because he loves sinners. He died for murderers, and He can use even murderers for His good purposes.

Again, Bernard Nathanson, who terminated 60,000 pregnancies later repented, gave his life to Christ, and became a champion for the unborn. He was once asked why he converted and he said this, 'No [other] religion matches the special role for forgiveness that is afforded by the Church.'

Norma McCorvey, the 'Jane Roe' in Roe vs. Wade also gave her life to Christ and found forgiveness and healing. She said this of her transformation: 'I kept seeing a picture of [a] tiny, 10-week-old embryo...[and] it's as if blinders just fell off my eyes and I suddenly understood the truth—that's a baby! All those years I was wrong, signing that affidavit I was wrong, working in a clinic I was wrong. It was so clear. Painfully clear.'

My friends if you are struggling with that kind of pain. That guilt and shame. If this has been your story. I want to assure you there is hope. Because our God is the Father of mercies. And I can introduce you to people in this parish who have walked that path and found healing and freedom and peace—and they would be happy to walk with you. Because nothing is impossible with God.

But secondly, in addition to repenting, we should also *respond*. Every year I attend the Low Country Pregnancy Center's annual banquet. And with a thousand other people I listen to courageous young moms and dads who come up on stage, often with tears streaming down their faces, and share testimonies of how they chose Life. And usually it's because *someone* reached out to help them. Someone encouraged them, someone told them of a better way, someone provided resources.

And I want to thank you, the people of St. Michael's for responding and supporting this life-changing ministry. This year alone you donated: 3 car seats , 3

strollers, 2 pack and plays, 114 baby outfits, 24 baby bottles, 73 bibs, 49 containers of baby wipes, 30 stuffed animals, 26 towels, 36 pairs of socks, 19 containers of baby formula, 39 pacifiers, 24 toiletry items, over 4,000 diapers, and dozens of other items including snuglies, high chairs, bassinets, neck pillows, feeding equipment, nursing pumps, and crib sheets. My friends, you have made a difference for Life.

In closing, I don't know of a more powerful example of standing for Life than Mother Theresa. In 1994 this little old lady stood up before the most powerful man in the world, the President of the United States together with his senators and congressmen, and she said this:

*The greatest destroyer of peace today is abortion, because it is a war against the child, a direct killing of the innocent child...Please don't kill the child. I want the child. Give me the child. I am willing to accept any child [at risk].*

She then closed her address:

*From here [in America], a sign of care for the weakest of the weak...MUST go out to the world. If you become a burning light of justice and peace...THEN you will be true to what the founders of this country stood for.*

My friends, let us respond to the call of Mother Theresa. Let us respond to the call of Jesus Christ. Let us stand for life and protect the weak and the vulnerable. Let us be a voice for the voiceless—whatever the cost. As Martin Luther said, *I have before me God's Word which cannot fail, nor can the gates of hell prevail against it; thereby will I remain, though the whole world be against me.*

Let us pray.

Gracious Lord, we give thanks today for the precious gift of life. We thank you for the unspeakable privilege of being made in your image.

And yet in light of such a gift, we also repent for the ways we have not honored the sanctity of life, the ways we have failed to protect those most vulnerable among us.

We ask your forgiveness and ask for the grace to stand courageously on behalf of the least, the last, and the lost. For Jesus' sake.