

22 January 2017  
Epiphany 3  
and Sanctity of Life Sunday

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“Seeing Life”

Text: Matthew 4:12-25; Isaiah 9:1-4

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

I'm guessing this will not be news to any of you . . . but we just had an inauguration on Friday. A new president. Some people are happy about that, and some are angry. Elections and inaugurations are always very partisan and political times in our nation.

And so, some would say, to have Sanctity of Life Sunday in such a context, is in danger of being seen in that context - as the church being partisan and political. Because it is a political issue in our country and in the world, and did play a part in the election.

So let me get this out of the way right away then.

Every life is sacred.  
Every life is deserving of respect, honor, dignity, and is of value.  
Every life is holy to God and a gift from God.

Your life is sacred whether you are a Republican, a Democrat, a Libertarian, Independent, or something else.

Your life is sacred whether you can feed and dress yourself or if you cannot, so whether you are very young, very old, or anywhere in between.

Your life is sacred whether or not you're able to see, hear, speak, or walk.

Your life is sacred whether you're male or female or even self-select some other gender.

Your life is sacred whether your heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, or asexual.

Your life is sacred whether you're a Black Lives Matter, an Occupy Wall Street, or an Alt-Right supporter.

Your life is sacred whether you're an immigrant or not, legal or not, pro-immigration or anti-immigration.

Your life is sacred whether you're Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Baha'i, Confusian, some other belief, or no belief at all.

Your life is sacred whether you're Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, mainline Protestant, Charismatic, Pentecostal, Baptist, or something else.

And yes, your life is sacred whether you're inside the womb or outside it.

Every life is sacred.

Every life is deserving of respect, honor, dignity, and is of value.

Every life is holy to God and a gift from God.

And so every life is worth our time, worth our energy, worth our effort, and worth our love.

And so Jesus spent time with the politicals of his day, with Pharisees and Sadducees. He blessed children and helped the very old. He cared about and healed those who could not see, hear, speak, or walk. He dealt with zealots. He loved male and female, Jews and Gentiles, and even Samaritans. And then He died for them. All of them. For all their sins, all their wrongness, all their false belief, all their divisiveness, all their anger and hatred toward Him even - all of it. He died for all of it. Because these lives were His. He made them, and He wanted them back. Whoever they were, whatever they did. And so He redeemed them. With His own blood. Their blood may have boiled against Him, but He poured out His for them for the forgiveness of their sins.

And for ours.

For what we've done and failed to do. For what we've spoken and failed to speak. For the hatred in our hearts. For the demeaning and belittling thoughts that pollute our minds. For our wrong choices, for our rebellion, for our selfishness. For that fact that we have not considered every life worth our time, worth our energy, worth our effort, and worth our love.

So when Jesus said, ***Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand***, He wasn't just talking to "them." Repent, when the only kingdom you care about, the only life you care about, is your own.

Those are tough words, I know. But believe me when I say that I had to preach them to myself first before I preach them to you. Because ***when people walking in darkness see a great light***, that light hurts your eyes. It hurts when that light reveals our sin and how dark our hearts and minds really are. How darkened by sin. How entrenched in death. Ever since that day when God said to Adam: *the day you eat of it you will surely die . . .* and we've been dying ever since. Sometimes even choosing death over life because we

think that's better. Better than having a baby, better than suffering, better than putting up with someone, better than trying and loving and giving. Better! That a pretty deep darkness.

But the light that shows us our sin also shows us something else that we cannot see in the darkness - **life**.

That's sounds funny, for of course we can see life! But can we? Really? **Or does the light of Jesus reveal life we cannot see?**

Life in the dead body we are lowering into the grave.

Life in the itty, bitty boy or girl growing in the darkness of the womb.

Life in a person suffering so much they don't want to live.

Life in a person caught up in sin.

Life in a person who cannot remember what they did five minutes ago.

Life is a person who cannot speak or eat.

Life in a person severely handicapped.

Life given and sustained and loved by God.

Do we see? Can we see? Can we see as Jesus saw? That all these lives are really worth more than just His time, His energy, His effort, and His love, but worth His own life?

We can. Because Jesus is the light of the world, the light no darkness can overcome. The light that shone forth from the manger. The light that shone forth as Jesus cared for and healed the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, paralytics, and more. The light that shone forth in His forgiveness. The light that shone forth from his cross. And the light that shone in His resurrection, when Jesus defeated the darkness of death once and for all. To give hope to all of us. All of us walking in the darkness of sin and the shadow of death. There's more than darkness. There's more than death. We have light and we have life.

Though it's not easy. Life is often messy and difficult. I think of those we heard about today - Peter and Andrew, James and John, who Jesus called to follow Him. That day life didn't get an easier for them, but in fact it got pretty messy and complicated pretty fast. They saw life and they saw opposition. They saw life and then they saw that life strung up on a cross to die. And they saw His tomb. His big, strong, dark, ugly, final tomb.

And then they saw life again. Life from the dead. Life that conquers death.

And then Jesus sent them to both live that life and give that life to others. To give them eyes to see life. It still wasn't easy. In fact, it got harder as it was not Jesus who was suffering and dying, but they themselves. But they could see now.

Life.

Life when they were being persecuted.  
Life when they were being whipped.  
Life when they were being imprisoned.  
Life when they were being martyred.  
The world said to them: We're in charge of who lives and who dies.  
And they said: No, you're not! *We saw the one who is.*

And as long as God gave them life in this world, they gave that life to others. They preached it. They gave it in the forgiveness of sins. They baptized it into people, and bodied and bloodied it into people. The same Body and Blood that died and rose to life again, now doing the same for us, in us.

And so the early church called baptism *illumination*, enlightening. The light going on and being able to see, really see, life. Another early church father showed how baptism reverses everything for us. For, he said, *by nature* we live and then we die, but *in baptism* we die with Christ and then we live.

And so Jesus sent those twelve out into the world and said: go, baptize. Or in other words: go, and give life. And teach. Teach about this life. This life I give now, and this life I give forever. Help them to see. Give them eyes to see, as I see. That every life is worth our time, our energy, our effort, our love, and yes, *even our own life.*

And they did. And the church still is. That's why you're here. You are baptized and given life. You repent and are given life. You are fed and given life. To live and see life. To see life where others do not see life, and so give hope where others see no hope, to give love where others see nothing to love.

And that's not partisan or political.  
**That's just Jesus.**

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.