

19 January 2020
Epiphany 2 / Sanctity of Life Sunday

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“A Message of Love”

Text: Isaiah 49:1-7; 1 Corinthians 1:1-9; John 1:29-42a

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

God loves you. That’s the message of this Sanctity of Life Sunday. It’s really the same message as every other Sunday of the year. And yet, on this Sunday, it’s a bit different, too. A little more important to say. And to say a bit louder and a bit more boldly.

We just sang of this love:

*The only Son from heaven,
Foretold by ancient seers,
By God the Father given,
In human form appears.
No sphere His light confining,
No star so brightly shining
As He, our Morning Star.* (LSB #402, v. 1)

What light is that? The light of His love. The love of the Father to send His Son. The love of the Son to go to the cross and die for the sin of the world. The love Isaiah, too, spoke of, when he prophesied of the still-coming Jesus:

*I will make you as a light for the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.*

To shine the light of God’s love to all nations; to the ends of the earth.

But what does *the ends of the earth* mean? Pole to pole? Sea to shining sea? All seven continents? Yes. But you’re thinking too big. You need to think smaller.

That my salvation, that the light of my love, God says, ***may reach*** from womb to tomb. From the big house to the poor house. From homes gilded with gold to those made of cardboard. From first world to third world. To winners and losers. To wanted and unwanted. Married, single, divorced, widowed. Big families, no families, broken families, blended families. Literate and illiterate. Educated and not educated. **God loves you.**

Do you think that way? Do you act that way?

If you ask people who their favorite team or favorite athlete is, most folks don't usually pick the team that finished last, or the guy who sits on the bench and doesn't play much. They pick the winners, the stars, the MVPs and the GOATs - not the you-lost-us-the-game kind of "goats," but the **Greatest Of All Time** "goats." That's who the world loves.

Do you think that way? Do you act that way?

Think about who Jesus picked to be His disciples. The guys who fish all night and catch nothing. Those are the folks who today shoot the air balls, miss the penalty kicks, fall off the beam, and drop the pass. Folks who sit so far down the end of the bench that no one even knows their names! To *them*, Jesus said, follow me.

Do you think that way? Do you act that way?

Statistics say the world does not. And like it or not, the world is a powerful catechist. Even to us. About who is worth something and who is not. Who is important and who is not. And the messages we are bombarded with every day are bound to influence us and our thinking. Making our message this Sanctity of Life Sunday even more important.

For the world continues to snuff out life. Life it thinks is not important or of any worth. It was reported that abortion was the leading cause of death worldwide last year, accounting for approximately 42 million, or 42% of all deaths. But then add to that number all the mercy killing, assisted suicide, genocide, murder, war, neglect, abuse. Seems like a whole lotta things considered more important than life - my life or my neighbor's life.

But the truth is, that after all those other things that seem more important go away, your life and your neighbor's life is the only thing that's not. That will go on living.

And so Jesus comes into this world of death with His life. Teaching us and showing us that **God loves you. No matter who you are.**

Many today will tell you that whatever that is growing inside a woman is not a baby, not a person, not a life. But Jesus says: *that baby is worth my life.*

Many today will tell you that handicapped persons are not fully human, so not worth as much. But Jesus says: *that person is worth my life.*

Many today will tell you that the elderly, the suffering, the dying, are not worth keeping around. But Jesus says: *that person is worth my life.*

Can we learn to see others that way? Do you think that would change us?

That's why Paul could thank God for the Corinthians, as we heard today. Otherwise, he certainly wouldn't have! They were a mess. There were so many problems in that church. And yet Paul saw something else in them. People worth the life of Jesus. And so worth his life.

Can we learn to see others that way? Do you think that would change us?

How do you look at others? Even in here? Do we see them this way, or judge them some other way? Think them not worth as much . . . of our love, our time, our energy, our effort, our forgiveness?

And so Jesus not only came into this world of death with His life, **He comes into this world of sin with His forgiveness**. Teaching us and showing us that **God loves you**. No matter what you have done, where you have fallen, how much you have failed. Jesus says: *you are worth my life*.

Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

That's how John put it. For Jesus didn't just come to live with sinners, He became one. He didn't just live with those *despised* and *abhorred*, He became that, according to Isaiah. Sometimes people go out and sleep in a box and go hungry one night to see what that's like, to be homeless - and that's fine. But don't think that's what Jesus did. He did much more than that for you. He became that. He became you. And died for you. That you know His love and have His life.

And He stayed. That's what His first disciples wanted to know. In the reading from John they asked Jesus, **where are you staying?** Because He was. He wasn't just dropping in or dropping by for a short time. He came to stay. Even after His death, resurrection, and ascension. For Jesus told those same disciples: *I am with you always, to the end of the age* (Matthew 28:20). And so Jesus' love and light is *to the ends of the earth and to the end of the age*.

So where is He staying today? You know. In His Word and Sacraments. Here is His love and forgiveness for you and for all. His Baptism saying: *you are worth My life*; I want you as My child. His Absolution saying: *you are worth My life*; I forgive all that you have done, all the places you have fallen, everywhere you have failed. And His Supper saying: *you are worth My life*; My life I give to you in My Body and Blood. Take and eat and live. Because your life is important to Me, is holy to Me, is worth everything I have.

You may not think of yourself that way, or others that way, and yet . . . that's what Isaiah wants you to know. That's what Paul wants you to know. That's what John wants you to

know. That it's true. **God loves you.** Jesus died for you. And for all people. Even those who today take life. And advocate for the taking of life.

Can we learn to see ourselves that way? And see others that way? Do you think that would change us?

And if others despise us and abhor us for that - for speaking up for life, for trying to put an end to abortion, for babies, for the disabled, for the elderly, for the suffering, for the dying, for trying to put an end to mercy killing and assisted suicide, for sinners big and small, for young and old, for wanted and unwanted, for trying to speak for the sanctity and worth of every life - if people despise us and abhor us for that . . . well, we're in good company. So was Jesus. But He came for all and stayed for all, is for all and wants all. To the ends of the earth and to the end of the ages.

And so the message of the church on this Sanctity of Life Sunday, and every Sunday, is **God loves you.** And today maybe we say it a bit louder and a bit more boldly.

And today we pray that not only may we say **God loves you,** but that we say this too: **and so do we.** Lord, stay with us and give us - and all the world - such love. The love you have for us. For all people. For all life.

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.