

Good morning. It is so good to be here with you again today.

King Solomon, in pondering the meaning of life and searching for wisdom, said, ***For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven . . .*** and then he lists what many of those times and seasons are.

And some of the things he lists are:

a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;

a time to break down, and a time to build up;

a time to weep, and a time to laugh;

a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

and many more.

But the very first pair that he names in that long list is this: that there is ***a time to be born, and a time to die*** (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8).

Sadly, for far too many, the time to be born never comes, and the time to die comes too soon. And that is true *not only* in our day and age, but perhaps *more so* in our day and age than ever before. Whether it is by surgery or pill, by force or for convenience, cheerfully, tearfully, or fearfully, far too many little boys and little girls are never given a chance, a time to be born. And those who are, who do get the chance, for how many does the time to die come too soon? Because they are told they are not worth anything, they are told that to die is better, or because of crime or violence, bullying or neglect?

And as sad as that all is, there is something even sadder still: that this is celebrated by some, and called progress.

But for each and every one of these lives whose end comes too soon, whether young or old, born or preborn, able or disabled, wanted or unwanted, our Father in heaven is grieved. Jesus wept at Lazarus' tomb. Death is not a solution, it is the enemy. It is not to be embraced, **it is to be overcome.**

So when King Solomon penned these words, that there is ***a time to be born, and a time to die***, he was not only searching for wisdom, **he was searching for an answer.** And in searching for an answer, he *prophetically* pointed us to the answer - the answer to life, the answer to death, and the answer to sin, when we take life and death into our own hands. Because there is not only a time for us to be born and for us to die, there was also a divinely appointed time for *God Himself* to be born, and for *God Himself* to die.

And approximately 950 years after Solomon composed these words, that time came. **The time to be born . . . for Jesus.** All of you, or most of you at least, know

the story: the angel Gabriel, the virgin Mary, the journey to Bethlehem, no room in the inn, the birth, the manger, the visit of the shepherds and the wise men. But here is how the Apostle Paul wrote of it. He said, **when the fullness of time had come** - or another translation says, *at just the right time*, or, we could say, *at the divinely appointed time* - **God sent forth His Son, born of woman . . . to redeem** us (Galatians 4:4). It was ***His time to be born***.

God had that time in His mind even before the creation of the world, but He then promised that He would do that when our first parents, Adam and Eve, decided there was **a time to die**. Before that, there wasn't! There was no death, only life. But with their sin, now there was death, and **a time to die** for them and for us. But God stepped in and promised life, by a Saviour. And at the time appointed, in the fullness of time, at just the right time, the divinely appointed time, God the Son was born into our world.

But God had appointed another time, too: **a time** for His Son **to die**. And when *that* time, that hour had come (John 12:23), Jesus did. He laid down His life for the life of the world. Exactly as God planned, exactly as the prophets foretold. That though all die, all may live. That there might be for all **a time to be born** - a time to be born again, born from above, as children of God. That though we all now have **a time to die**, we also have a time to rise to life again in Jesus. That because He lives, we also shall live.

And for this, too, there is a time. The time set by the Father for Jesus to return in glory, and take us to life eternal. *A time* we all pray will be soon!

But until that time, it is time for us to do what we have been given to do.

A time to *Celebrate Life!* as we are doing this weekend. That life is the gift of God. Life that God creates, redeems, and sanctifies. Life that is not an accident and not by chance, but life filled with purpose, meaning, and value. And when we know that, we know of many more times as well . . .

That there is a time to speak, and a time to defend.

A time to confess, and a time to forgive.

A time to teach, and a time to pray.

A time to care, and a time to provide.

A time to support, and a time to give.

A time to rejoice, and a time to work.

A time to use the gifts, talents, abilities, and faith that God has blessed us with, where He has put us, and to the people He has given us. *For life*.

And as we do, remembering this very important fact: that ***we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places*** (Ephesians 6:12). We must remember who our true enemy is. And if this work isn't easy - and as you all well know, it's not! - it's because of who our enemy is, and that he knows his time is short. So his lies and deception will continue, and maybe even intensify, but the truth will prevail.

Those two reasons are why ours is not an angry protest movement, but a joy-filled, love-reflecting, pro-life movement! We know the Victor and His victory. And so with Him and in Him we are like Him. We are pro-baby, pro-mother, pro-father, and pro-family. We love those at the beginning of life and those at the end of life. And all those in-between, too. **Because that's what Jesus did**, and it's not so much that we do because we follow His example, or do so because He commanded us, but because He put His love and His Spirit into our hearts.

And in the end, that's what it's all about: the love of Jesus and the Spirit of Jesus poured into our hearts. Jesus, who died to save the abortion provider, the abortion user, and the abortion supporter. Who died to save us when we are less-than-loving. Who came to love us and strengthen us through unplanned pregnancies, when life is hard and confusing, when we have disabled family members, and those who can no longer remember us.

The Dobbs decision was great, a step in the right direction. But only a step. Since then there have been set backs, we heard about some yesterday, states enacting laws and amending their constitutions in ways that do not support life. My state of Virginia has those working on this. The Supreme Court punted on the case removing restrictions from mifepristone. And more. All of which is a reminder to us that the right laws and more laws may help, but isn't really the answer. The answer is Jesus. The answer is to change hearts.

Changing the law is hard. It took 50 years to get Dobbs! But hearts are harder still. And so maybe you might even, at times, feel like Solomon, who would also write, when pondering life: ***What gain has the worker from his toil?*** (Ecclesiastes 3:9) For you may not see results. You may want to throw up your hands and give up. Your toil may be long and hard and thankless.

But it is never in vain! King Solomon said all is vanity, all is meaningless. **But he was wrong**. Because as Isaiah reminds us, God's Word never returns empty, but accomplishes that for which God purposes, and succeeds in the thing for which He sends it (Isaiah 55:11). And that is true for His written word, His spoken Word, *and especially* His Word made flesh, Jesus. He is still giving life and redeeming life, and so we will continue to celebrate His gift of life. And fight to protect it.

So thank you for all you do. I thank God for all of you and what He is able to accomplish through you.

And I will close with these words of encouragement from the Apostle Paul, at the end of His great resurrection chapter: ***Therefore, my beloved brothers [and sisters], be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain*** (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Let us pray . . .

Heavenly Father, author and creator of life, protector and preserver of life, and lover of life, thank You for the gift of life You give and continue to give, thank You for sending Your Son to be the Redeemer of life, that all might have life and have it abundantly, and thank You for the gift of Your Spirit, without whom we would be lost.

Fill us with faith and confidence, that there is nothing in all creation that can separate us from Your love. And with that faith and confidence, embolden us in the fight for each and every life. When we are afraid, give us the fearlessness of David standing against Goliath. When we are weak, give us the strength of Paul, who said when I am weak, then I am strong. When we despair, point us to the empty tomb, and give us joy. When we are confused, give us Your wisdom and the clarity of Your Word. And give us the love we need to love our enemies, and the compassion we need to pray for those who persecute us. For Your Son died for them, too. And wants to save them, too.

So may Your Word of life that resounds not only today but everyday, reach all people, and let them know they are valued and loved. May the message of life that resounds today in this city be heard by those who need to hear that their life has meaning, that all life is precious, and protect all life, we pray. Use all of us and the gifts, talents, and abilities You have given us. Some in big ways, some in small ways, but none in unimportant ways. Protect all who gather on the Mall now, from the heat, from all harm and danger, and bless the time we have left together here, that we learn, that we encourage and support one another, and rejoice in all that You are doing, until the day You call us home to be with You in Your kingdom, when all sin is overcome, and where there is only life.

Hear our prayers, dear Father, for the sake of Your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
AMEN