

“Core Values: Life”

Matthew 25:34-40 • Genesis 1:26-31

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • January 22, 2017

Last week we began talking about the core values of our church, those things that we consider to be so important to who we are as a congregation that without them we would not be the same church. As I mentioned last week, these are not values we’re trying to impose on the church members or on society. These are the things that you told us were important to you. So, as I promised, beginning today we are going to look at each one of these in the next few weeks. However, we are not going to go through them in order. In fact, today I’m going to start with the last one, and there’s a good reason for it.

As a church, really as followers of Jesus, we say that we value life. That’s what I want to talk about today. The reason I’m starting with that one is that today is National Sanctity of Human Life Sunday. Sanctity of Human Life Sunday started with a proclamation by President Reagan in 1984 and has been commemorated in many churches every year since.

Before I get to far into this subject I want to acknowledge that this issue of life can be a polarizing hot-button political issue. This morning I’m not going to get into the political aspects of this topic. We’re not going to talk about what *other* people should or shouldn’t do. Instead, we’re going to focus on the Bible and what God is calling *us* to think and do. Remember, one of the purposes of articulating our core values is to let them influence our actions. Let me add that you are free to disagree with me. One of the foundational principals of Presbyterianism is what’s called the “right of private judgment.” What that means is simply that you have an obligation to look at the evidence of Scripture and make up your own mind. So while these core values guide our common life together, you may not agree with them personally.

As we were working on these core values someone asked me why I thought we needed to include life as one of our values. This person

felt that it was just part of what it means to be a Christian and therefore didn’t need to be spelled out. The sad truth is that there are many churches who do not hold a biblical view of life, so it *is* important for us to spell it out.

Over the last couple of years there has been a lot of discussion in our culture about whose lives matter. Actually, I don’t think discussion is the right word – more like a lot of shouting. Let me ask you – what determines a person’s value? That’s really what the argument is about. How do we determine someone’s value? Is it money? Is it their usefulness to others? Is it their unique abilities or the kind of job they hold or where they live? Is a person’s value based on their gender or skin color or body size? Most of us would say no, a person’s value is not based on any of those things. But we’re still left with the question. How do we determine someone’s value? The problem, though, is in the question. You see, the problem is when we believe that a majority of the population is able to decide the value of other human beings. That’s how we end up with genocide or the German holocaust or slavery or legalized abortion and euthanasia and doctor-assisted suicide.

One of the reasons the Church exists – and I’m talking about the whole Church, not just our congregation – one of the reasons the Church exists is to offer an alternative to a decaying culture. Jesus said we are to be like salt, which acts as a preservative. The Church is often called to be counter-cultural. To a culture that doesn’t value life, a culture that tries to determine a person’s value based on all kinds of things, many of which are beyond the person’s control, to a culture of death we stand up and say, “we believe all lives matter.” Here’s why.

All humans matter, every person is valuable, because they are made in the image of God. Right there in the beginning of the Bible, in Genesis 1, we read, “So God created man (humans) in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he

created them.” That means that every person has inherent dignity. In a recent article Russell Moore wrote that human dignity is a spiritual issue. He said, “It’s a spiritual issue because the gospel grounds human dignity in Jesus Christ himself. In Christ, God has forever joined deity with flesh. Jesus did not merely become human once; he is human to this day, and God’s purposes in Christ center on the humanity which bears the Creator’s divine image. To deny human dignity, then, is to deny Christ himself.”

All humans are valuable simply because they’re human. To be human is to be created in the image of God. Turn to the person next to you and say, “You were made in the image of God and you are valuable.”

Now if every human life is valuable to God, if God is concerned about every person, then it naturally follows that you and I should be concerned as well. What matters to God should matter to us. This is what Jesus was saying in Matthew 25. God is concerned about the hungry and thirsty, the lonely, those without enough clothing, the sick, and those in prison. Jesus says that when you and I care for those that our culture has decided have less value – he refers to them as “the least of” – we are actually caring for Jesus himself.

Because every human bears the image of God, because we carry some of God’s nature in us, God forbids taking an innocent life. One of the Ten Commandments is “You shall not murder.” As a church, when we say we value life we are saying that we are opposed to the taking of innocent human life. The question, then, becomes “who qualifies as a human?” We believe that the Church has a responsibility to protect those who are most vulnerable in society, especially the preborn and those nearing the end of life. Scientists have clearly shown us that life begins at the moment of conception. At that very moment there is a distinct human life with a distinct DNA. In less than three weeks the baby’s heart, brain, spinal column, and nervous system are almost complete and by the 24th day her heart begins to

beat. From the moment of conception a unique human created in the image of God is developing and needs only oxygen, water, and nutrients to grow.

Remember, we already said that body size does not determine a person’s value. So we have to ask ourselves, “on what basis can we say that that child, that human bearing the image of God, has less value than someone else?” Yet that’s exactly what has happened more than 58 million times in this country in the last 44 years.

So if the Church is called to work to protect the most vulnerable, people who can’t protect themselves, what can we do? Let me tell you there’s plenty we can do. The most important thing we can do is pray. God hears the prayers of His people and responds. Pray that people’s eyes would be opened to what’s really at stake. Pray that women who are pregnant and those who care for the elderly and those who feel they have no hope left would realize that life is precious and that all lives matter. And pray for those who struggle with past decisions. Pray that they would experience the loving forgiveness of Jesus.

But there’s more we can do. The Pregnancy Center serves women who have an unplanned pregnancy. They provide ultrasounds so they can see their baby. They provide parenting classes and diapers and other baby supplies, and they provide counseling. And the need is great. One of the ways we can promote life is to do as Jesus commanded us. We can serve by meeting the needs of the women and families who come to the pregnancy center. And we can help other people understand the importance of standing up for life. Finally, we can work to restore dignity to people who are at the margins of society. As Jesus said, “as you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to me.”

So, we value life because God values life. We stand up for life because Jesus commands us to work for justice and compassion. We’re pro-life because Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.

Amen.