



*TO BE COMPLETELY AND COHERENTLY  
PRO-LIFE*

*A sermon by The Rev. Bill Haley*

at The Falls Church Anglican  
on January 22, 2017 in the series  
'Following Jesus as Lord'

Sermon Texts:  
1 Kings 11:1-11; Luke 18:15-17; Psalm 139:1-16

The original sermon can be heard at  
[www.tfcanglican.org](http://www.tfcanglican.org)

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Today is Sanctity of Life Sunday, and around this time each year thousands of churches take a Sunday to recall and to proclaim that human life is a sacred thing, and that each and every human life matters. It's a celebration of life, but it's for a very sad reason. Forty-four years ago, exactly to the day, our Supreme Court decided to legalize abortion in the case of *Roe v. Wade*, and since that time, almost 60 million children in our country have not gotten to see the light of day because their lives were cut short. So on this day we not only reaffirm the value of each human life from the very beginning to the very end, we also recall and let sink in the tremendous loss of life we've known in these past four decades and that is still going on in great numbers, and we grieve.

If you've had personal experience with this tragedy, we grieve with you today. You need to know, there is forgiveness with God, and healing. If you've participated in an abortion, we love you. God loves you, and we want you to be free through Jesus Christ. If that's you, please come see me after the sermon so I can be of any help I can.

In our current sermon series we are considering Jesus the Lord, so on this day, when we consider that Jesus is the Lord of Life, it is not only Jesus, but the whole Trinity that is Lord of Life! We read in Job 12:10, "In God's hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind." An early title for Jesus in Acts 3 is the "Author of life," and if the author, then the owner. When we say the Nicene Creed week by week, we affirm our faith in the Holy Spirit, "the Lord and giver of life."

Two weeks ago, John Yates<sup>1</sup> helped us see what it means that Jesus is Lord of our Life as individuals. Someone who has Jesus as Lord of his or her life will trust Jesus wholeheartedly, obey him fully, and let his thoughts and actions be the foundation for our thoughts and actions. God as the God of life itself means that God is the one who created life: God is the one who gives life, he's the one who sustains life, and he's the only one who can rightfully take it away.

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<sup>1</sup> John Yates served as the Rector of The Falls Church Anglican from 1979-2019.

The headwaters of this is in Genesis 1 and 2, the Bible's account of the creation of all things and of human life itself. In Genesis 1:26-27, "God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, after our likeness.' ... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them." God breathes into the man, and so begins walking around the most valuable creature to walk on the planet, a human being. Psalm 8 says, "God made mankind a little lower than the angels, and crowned him with glory and honor."

So from the very beginning of the Bible to its very end we see a remarkable commitment to the dignity of each human life. The fact that God made people and that people bear God's image becomes the basis for why we are commanded not to kill, as in Genesis 9:6. There God warns us not to kill another. Why? "For God made man in his own image." That each human life bears the image of God means that each human life is sacred. Something that is sacred is something that is valuable, something you treasure and protect.

**So the Bible teaches and Christians believe that each and every human being—unborn, born, young, middle-aged, and elderly—is made in the image of God and is of infinite and equal value. Every human life is sacred, at every stage of life.**

This has led Christians to do counter-cultural things to protect human life from the very beginning. In the early days in Rome, it was common for any Roman baby who was undesirable for any reason to be left outside in the elements to die or to be picked up. Very often it was the early Christians who picked them up and who spoke out against the practice. I'll let Philip Yancey tell it:

*When Roman citizens abandoned their unwanted babies to wild animals or the ravages of weather, Christians organized platoons of wet nurses and adoptive families. When plague broke out and villagers fled, the Christians stayed behind to care not only for their relatives but also for their pagan neighbors.*

There they were, caring for individual lives at every stage of life.

You'd think that with such clear commands throughout the Bible about this, God's people would consistently have lived with a completely pro-life ethic. But they haven't, and that's what we see in our Old Testament reading today. Something else we see is what makes God really angry.

We're in 1 Kings 11. Solomon had become king after David and presided over the nation of Israel in a season of unprecedented wealth, prosperity, and peace. But he liked the ladies, a lot of them, and all different types, from all different nations. He married many of them and slept with many more, and eventually adopted their gods, as in verse 4: "When Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God." In short, Solomon broke the covenant that God had made with his people, which was simply that if they worshiped and obeyed no other God but him, God would bless them and things would go well with them.

God's people breaking God's covenant was the huge problem of the Old Testament, with **three big problems** that spread from it. These three things God hates, and we see him decrying them consistently through the prophets for the next 600 years of Israel's history that would lead to their judgment, exile, and the silence of God.

The first big problem is **idolatry**, worshiping gods that are not God (verses 5-7).

For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and did not wholly follow the Lord, as David his father had done. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem.

Idolatry was a huge problem. The second big problem is what went along with that idolatry, the practice of **infanticide**. Did you hear the names of the gods Chemosh and Molech?

What is chilling is that we know from biblical testament, extra-biblical historical sources, and archaeological evidence that by either name, Chemosh and Molech required infant sacrifice to increase the fertility of the land. When the Israelites and Judeans worshiped these other gods, just like the other nations, they did it by burning their children alive as sacrifices. Obviously, God didn't want this and had said as much, hundreds of years earlier, in Leviticus 18:21. "Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Molech, for you must not profane the name of your God. I am the LORD."

But Solomon did, and many of the kings after him did so as well, like Manasseh in 2 Kings 21, and Ahaz in 2 Kings 28. And if the kings were doing it, so were the people, and even the priests. It's in Psalm 106, and also in Jeremiah 32:32-35, coming 350 years after Solomon:

"The people of Israel and Judah have provoked me by all the evil they have done—they, their kings and officials, their priests and prophets, the men of Judah and the people of Jerusalem. ... They built high places for Baal...to sacrifice their sons and daughters to Molech."

Consistently we read through the Old Testament that God's people weren't acting like God's people, and because of this they would be judged. They had broken the covenant, the huge problem, by practicing idolatry and infanticide.

The third big problem that God hates and that shows up again and again throughout the Old Testament is that **his people allowed for economic injustice and didn't care for the poor.**

There are dozens of examples of this throughout the Old Testament, but just for today, these are out of Amos:

This is what the LORD says: "For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as

upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed.” (Amos 2:6-7)

“You trample on the poor and force him to give you grain... For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts.” (Amos 5:11-12)

When the people of God lost their allegiance to God through breaking the covenant and idolatry, the effect was infanticide and oppression. **Simply put, the loss of God meant loss of respect for human life in all of its stages.** As opposed to all the other gods of the day, the true God, Yahweh, said you will *not* sacrifice your children, you will *not* oppress the poor, you will *not* persecute the stranger in your land because each person, every one, is made in my image. The people lost sight of God; thus, they also lost sight of the value of his most important creation, humankind. And then they killed, either by fire or by poverty.

As we’ve already seen, after Jesus came, God’s people began acting differently, much more consistently pro-life. Philip Yancey again: “They quietly demonstrated a better way to live, the way they believed Jesus had taught.” Over the centuries the church has done this on many occasions, and many times it’s done a great job. But at times, it must be said, the church has done a pretty poor job of being consistently pro-life.

**We Christians today want to do a great job of it, of being completely pro-life, because our Lord is the Lord of Life at every stage—unborn, born, young, middle-aged, and elderly.** I want to say it again, I love saying it: **each and every human being has equal and infinite value at every stage of life. The unborn matter, the born matter, the elderly matter.** If there’s a threat to the life of any and each one of these, Christians are those most called to defend and protect them. All should, and Christians must. The Lord of Life is our Lord! Each life reflects the image of the One we love and serve.

This is made clear in the canons, the rules, of our own Anglican Church. Canon II.8.3 reads, “All members and Clergy are called to **protect and respect the sanctity of every human life from conception to natural death.**” Let’s pause on each of those three stages of life.

### **Conception**

We believe and teach that life begins at **conception**; thus, abortion takes a human life, is wrong to do, and shouldn’t be done. This year there’s actually some good news, even though it’s still grim. As you know, the rate of abortion in our country has been declining for many years, and in the most recent year for which there’s complete data, 2014, there was the lowest number of abortions since 1973. The number of abortions performed in 2014– 926,200– is the lowest ever since *Roe v. Wade* was decided. This is the right trajectory, and there are lots of factors for it– greater access to contraception, tighter legislative restrictions on abortion providers, advances in ultrasound technology and required ultrasounds during pregnancy, greater access to healthcare for both pregnant mothers and young mothers and their children– all aided by the voice of the church for the defenseless. I’m so grateful for this trajectory. We want to see it continue in that direction with much greater speed, and as Christians we have our part to play in that, while we might have different opinions on the best ways to accomplish that goal. But despite the right trajectory, still tomorrow 2,537 children will lose their lives to abortion. That’s 2,537 too many.

So we must pray.

And we must continue to speak up and say, “This is not right, and it’s not healthy, and it costs too much because it costs a life and many lives.” I hope you’ll join me and others from our church and churches around the country this Friday for the March for Life in Washington, D.C.

And perhaps the greatest way a Christian can act is to adopt and foster children. That’s about the loudest statement of being pro-life that a person can make.

I'll never forget the National Prayer Breakfast in 1994 when Mother Teresa, flanked by the Clintons, said, "I've heard it said that there are unwanted children in America. I want your children, give them to me. There are no unwanted children in America. I want them." She was, of course, referring to her Missionaries of Charity being available to adopt any child, and no one doubted her sincerity.

And I'll never forget Gordon Cosby and the Church of the Savior in Washington, D.C. in the early 1970s. They were aware of the many children languishing in the D.C. foster care system, so they set out to find a home for every foster child in the city. They each took kids in—both for fostering and for adoption—and when their own church wasn't big enough to receive all the children, they went door to door asking people to open their homes to foster kids. They were able to see every child find a home. It took them a couple years, but they did it.

I'm so grateful for the work of DC127 going on right now with the same goal in Washington D.C. I desperately would like to see something similar in Northern Virginia, and our church could do that.

## **TO**

So, three stages of life. First, conception. The second stage is the longest period of life and the shortest word. Just two letters. It's that small word in the middle, the small word "to." T-O. To. What happens after a person is born until, hopefully, a natural death.

**God cares about the "to."** God wants every human being alive at any stage—unborn, born, young, a little older, middle-aged, old, older still, elderly—to be who he made them to be, to live into his design for them specifically, and to be in a real relationship with him through Jesus, and to flourish.

Jesus said in John 10:10, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."

So as people who know that each and every human being is of infinite and equal value, we care about the "to" as well. We are pro-life before birth, and after birth, for a whole life, and we fight against anything that threatens someone's ability to



be who God made them to be, and there are a lot of threats. We're going to have different ideas on the best ways to address these critical issues; still, we are concerned and must think hard about how to approach these things from a pro-life perspective because they affect real people whom God loves on a very individual level.

We're concerned and seek to respect and protect people who are refugees and people who are **immigrants**—no matter how they got here—the strangers in our land. We're concerned about **victims of human trafficking** and **modern-day slavery**. We stand with and for **people with special needs**. We're concerned about **those in prison** and about the system that perpetuates **mass incarceration**, which disproportionately affects the African-American community. When **environmental degradation** leads to the diminished life or even death for some or many, we're concerned about that, because we're pro-life.

When issues are hot and divisive and politicized, still we let a consistent pro-life ethic inform our thoughts and our actions. One issue like that is **easy access to guns in our country**. Tomorrow thirty precious people will lose their lives to gun violence. That's thirty too many.

Being pro-life will affect how you think and act about the **death penalty**. This past Tuesday I had the unexpected honor to meet and hug Derrick Jamison, who introduced himself as #119. Derrick is the 119th person to be exonerated from death row after having been proven innocent, but not before spending more than 20 years on death row and 98% of that in solitary confinement. When I looked at him, I was so moved. "Derrick, you are a living, breathing example of what I believe so deeply, that every human being matters, each one, every one. Your life matters to God as much as the lives of my own kids, and I'm so glad it wasn't taken from you. I'm so grateful for those who worked to see you freed!"

### **Natural Death**

We're Christians. For each and every person, we care about life from conception all the way "to" **natural death**.

That's the third category in our church's canon. Currently, there's a great and dark temptation to determine that once a person's life has ceased to be useful to society, it would be better all the way around to prematurely end that life before nature takes its course. The technical term for this is *euthanasia*, basically putting someone to death before the body says it's time to go. There's a great move today towards what's called physician-assisted suicide, which is another step towards a very slippery slope of a system being able to determine who dies and who lives and for how long, for the sake of expense and expedience.

As Christians, we celebrate and uphold the dignity of life, all the way to the natural end of life. No one is expendable, no matter how expensive. The life that had infinite value and dignity at the very beginning and throughout all of life carries that dignity and value all the way to the end. With increasing advances in life-saving and life-sustaining technology, for which we can thank God, this has become a critically important and increasingly complex issue. But on this we can be clear, each and every life matters to God, all the way to the end, and we need to ensure that the life of the elderly or the life of the infirm is not considered of less value than any other.

Do you know what term I hate? It's the term *invalid*. Break that apart: in-valid. I don't think so. That's not how God sees anyone. No one on earth is an invalid.

So we protect and respect the sanctity of every human life from conception to natural death. **As people made in the image of God and given the heart and mind of Christ, we seek to be comprehensively, consistently, and completely pro-life.** The scope of the implications of this creates pretty challenging tensions to live in but we, of all people, must try. We, of all people, must pray. Jesus is the hope of the world, and we are his followers.

I've been struck recently at how **Jesus models for us this completely pro-life ethic.** In his day, children didn't matter that much. In our gospel reading this morning, people were bringing babies to Jesus to be blessed, and his own disciples were annoyed by it: "Don't waste the Master's time with the babies." Jesus rebuked them and said, "Let the little children come unto me." Lepers were

despised and feared and cast out in his day. Jesus went to them, he never turned them away, and he healed them. In Jesus' Jewish community, the Samaritans and the Gentiles were the outcast races, despised and feared. Jesus went to them, and talked to them, and made them the heroes of his stories. When the law of Jesus' day supported putting a woman to death for adultery, Jesus stopped the execution. When an older woman who had been sick for many years couldn't find healing, Jesus healed her. When an older man who'd been paralyzed for 38 years had lost hope, Jesus paid attention to him, went to him, and healed him. When a child he'd never met had died, he raised her.

We'd expect Jesus to do all these things, wouldn't we? After all, he's the Lord of Life. And he's our Lord.



**Rev. Bill Haley** is Executive Director of [Coracle](#), a ministry that exists to inspire and enable people to be the presence of God in the brokenness of the world through Spiritual Formation *for* Kingdom Action.

Some of this happens at Corhaven, a retreat home in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia near Mt. Jackson; some of it happens in the Washington, D.C. metro area and throughout the mid-Atlantic; some of it happens around the country and around the world.

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