

***The Sanctity of All Human Life***

Psalm 139:1-16, John 10:10

January 23, 2011

*O LORD, you have searched me and you know me.  
You know when I sit and when I rise;  
you perceive my thoughts from afar.  
You discern my going out and my lying down;  
you are familiar with all my ways.  
Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD.*

*You hem me in - behind and before;  
you have laid your hand upon me.  
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,  
too lofty for me to attain.*

*Where can I go from your Spirit?  
Where can I flee from your presence?  
If I go up to the heavens, you are there;  
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.  
If I rise on the wings of the dawn,  
if I settle on the far side of the sea,  
even there your hand will guide me,  
your right hand will hold me fast.*

*If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me  
and the light become night around me,  
even the darkness will not be dark to you;  
the night will shine like the day,  
for darkness is as light to you.*

*For you created my inmost being;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.  
I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;  
your works are wonderful, I know that full well.  
My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place.  
When I was woven together in the depths of the earth,  
your eyes saw my unformed body.  
All the days ordained for me  
were written in your book  
before one of them came to be.*

**Psalm 139:1-16**

Today is *Sanctity of Human Life Sunday*. The day when many Christian churches and others focus their attention on the preciousness of human life, in all its stages, but mostly when it comes to the issue of abortion and the unborn child.

The Scripture/Bible is pretty clear of the priority of which God gives to human life. Going way back to the beginning. The creation account in Genesis 1: after creating all things on heaven and on earth; from the moon, the sun, the stars, all things on land and in the water, trees, flowers, all the way to the birds of the air and the animals on ground and God saying, "Oh' it is so good." But then after creating humans, "in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen.1:27), then it says he looked and "saw all that he had made, and it was oh so very good" (Gen. 1:31).

The "sanctity" of human life. The word "sanctity" meaning holy or sacred. The preciousness of human life. Every human life is precious in the eyes of God.

2 Peter 3:9 tells us that God is patient with us humans. And He is patient with us for one reason, "He is patient with us because He does not want anyone to perish."

Jesus said, "the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10).

*The Sanctity of Human Life* starts in the womb, at the point of conception. To try and discover at what exact point a fetus is viable is absurd - if we believe that God is the one who is responsible for all of life. But the *Sanctity of Human Life* has to extend beyond the womb as well. It needs to extend to every stage of human life - from the point of conception - all the way to the end, with such things as end of life issues (i.e. advanced directives), and maybe even beyond with such things as organ, tissue and body donation.

Yes, the issue of Abortion should be an issue for all Americans. Since the U.S. Supreme court decision of Roe vs. Wade in 1973 there have been approx. 50 million babies aborted. I use the word "baby" because to use the word "fetus" minimizes the human life, and its value. Actually the numbers have decreased from a high of 1.6 million in 1990 to about 1.2 million today. But still a staggering figure, more than a million babies aborted each year in the U.S. For many what has become just another form of birth control.

But then there is the issue of Gun Violence. That too peaked in the early 1990's, where in 1993 more than 17,000 individuals died as a result of gun violence. There must have been something about those 1990's. Still, over 11,000 in 2005. Almost 70% of all murders committed in this country are committed with the use of a firearm but we'll do anything to protect our so called "inalienable right" to own any type of firearm - even if it comes at the cost of thousands of lives each year. Not easy answers to the gun control debate because many of the violent crimes are committed by those illegally possessing firearms. But not doing anything doesn't seem to be working.

And that leads to the issue of Suicide. Unfortunately suicide rates haven't decreased from the 1990's. In fact some age groups have increased significantly. More than 30,000 lives are

claimed by suicide each year, and that is a rather low estimate because many suicides don't get reported as suicides. Over 50% of all suicides come at the hands of a firearm.

Then there is the issue of the Death Penalty. Fortunately the number of executions in the United States has decreased since the 1990's. Maybe we are becoming a more "civilized" society? In fact just this week the newest member of the Ohio Supreme Court, who helped write the state's Capital Punishment Bill in 1981, expressed some serious concern about it. Serious concern, like the fact that blacks are still executed at significantly higher rates than whites - even when all other factors are taken into consideration. The fact that there is no supporting evidence whatsoever to show that the death penalty is a deterrent to those committing violent acts. The fact that the cost to prosecute just one death penalty case from beginning to end is in the millions of dollars. But the most compelling reason for eliminating the death penalty - since 1973, 130 people have been released from death row due to evidence of their innocence. Just how many innocent people have been executed is anybody's guess. Death penalty advocates say that is just the cost of doing business. But even if just one innocent life is taken - shouldn't that be pause for concern? And even for the guilty:

*"God is patient, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."*  
2 Peter 3:9 (NIV)

The same God who *rejoices in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who do not need to repent* (Luke 15:7).

Yes, the Old Testament or the Old Covenant standard is "an eye for an eye, tooth for tooth, life for life," but as Christians under the New Covenant aren't we supposed to be living by a different standard, the standard set by our Lord & King Jesus Christ, who said, "*You have heard that it was said, 'eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also*" (Matthew 5:38-39). The same Lord who spoke through the apostle Paul, *Do not repay anyone evil for evil. . . Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord* (Romans 12:17-19).

Then there is the issue of War where the number of deaths reported is often misleading. Not only are there the military deaths, of U.S. armed forces - 4,427 in Iraq and 1,283 in Afghanistan, and both still growing just about each and every day. The number of casualties sustained by enemy forces, we have no idea, but it has to be significantly higher. But perhaps even more concern should be the number of civilian deaths. Any ideas? It is hard to get accurate numbers. Those don't really get reported. But one of the estimates of the number of civilians killed in Iraq since the U.S. invasion in 2003 is said to be about 100,000 (99,374 - 108,492). How many civilians would have been killed had the U.S. not invaded? It is anybody's guess. When it comes to war is there really anyone who wins?

Not easy questions, and even harder answers. Clear signs that we live in a very broken and troubled world. Psalm 139 tells us that God had us in mind even before one of our days came to be. Even before we were conceived. *For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are*

*wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.*" God tells us to "number our days." Not specifically to count them, but to understand the importance of each and every one of them. He knows the number we do not. Can we cut short the number God has ordained for us, through our own actions and the actions of others? How much free will does God give us?

Whenever the sanctity, or the sacredness, of human life breaks down, at any point along the way, then we have lost the importance that God places on all of human life. Whenever we can disregard one segment of the human population - whether it be the unborn children, or the most senior members, or a specific race, or those professing a different religion, or those imprisoned, those with diminished mental capacity, the physically disabled, whatever group of humans it may be, it becomes easy to disregard any other group and eventually there is no dignity and respect for human life all together. It is really what happened in Hitler's Nazi Germany - from the mentally challenged, the physically disabled, homosexuals, Jews, then Christians who didn't side with German Christians, then anybody who didn't agree with everything the Third Reich stood for.

Of course it's pretty easy to say "well, that was them and that was then. That was, and is, over there. But not here in America." We don't really like to look at ourselves.

A little over ten days ago, up in the International Space Station, Scott Kelly, the commanding officer, spoke over the radio as the flight controllers in Houston fell silent. He began to speak, "As I look out the window, I see a very beautiful planet that seems very inviting and peaceful." He went on, "Unfortunately it is not. These days we are constantly reminded of the unspeakable acts of violence and damage we can inflict on one another, not just with our actions, but with our irresponsible words." "We're better than this," he said, "We must do better."

Who is Scott Kelly and why was he speaking this way? Well, two weeks ago, his sister-in-law, Congresswoman, Gabrielle Giffords was shot in the head in Arizona while staffing a booth where citizens could come and show their support, or air their complaints. Fellow representatives from both sides of the aisle say that Congresswoman Giffords was one of those unique individuals, while having her own strong feelings on certain issues, was highly respectful of people with differing views. Shot by someone who is now being described as a very mentally disturbed human being. Who one politician recently referred to on national television, over and over again, as a "nut." I just wanted to yell back into the television, "yet still, a human being created by God, with a mother and father and other family members who are grieving as much as, or more than, the families of the victims." That shooting taking place within a day of a female sheriff deputy being shot and killed and another police officer wounded, basically in our own community, by what can only be described as another mentally disturbed individual. Two individuals who should have never had access to firearms.

But Congresswoman Giffords was not the only victim of the shooting in Arizona. Six were killed and thirteen others wounded. The dead included:

Chief U.S. District Judge James Roll, age 63, married with three children. Justice Roll was no stranger to the potential for violence in people, he himself having received death threats in the past due to court decisions he had made.

Dorwin Stoddard, age 76, who had survived seventeen heart procedures over the years, and a recent fall from a 20 foot ladder. His friends were starting to wonder if anything could take his life. He died shielding his wife from the bullets.

Dorothy Morris, age 76, was a homemaker and retired secretary. Married her childhood sweetheart who was injured in the shooting.

Gabe Zimmerman, age 30, director of community outreach for Representative Giffords. Those who knew Gabe said he was as passionate as they come about social work and helping others, engaged to be married.

Phyllis Schneck, age 79, actually from Rutherford, New Jersey but liked to spend her winters vacationing in Arizona. A widowed homemaker, mother of three, known for volunteering at her church. Her family isn't even sure why she was at that specific store the day of the shooting because she normally shopped at a different store and had no interest in politics.

And then there is Christina-Taylor Green, age 9. A third grader who was already an aspiring politician. Had just been elected to the student council at her elementary school. Had gone to see one of her idols, Congresswoman Giffords. Christiana was the grand-daughter of Dallas Green - former manager of one of the Philadelphia Phillies world championship teams, and later the New York Yankees and New York Mets.

But even more intriguing, Christina was born on Sept. 11, 2001. She was among fifty children who were featured in a book entitled "Faces of Hope" - a collection of photographs of 50 children born on the day of Sept. 11, 2001. One child, one face, from each state.

Christina entered the world, just like every single one of us, as a "face of hope," on the same day as many exited the world through the violent acts of a few terrorists bent on destruction and evil. Do you think it is just a coincidence that Christina, who was born on such a fateful day, one who seemed to have so much potential, one considered to be "a face of hope," that she would be taken out of this world in such a violent way with so many others, whom each was a special child of God in their own way, or might God just be trying to get our attention? H" "We can do better!" "We must do better!"

If we could just grasp just how much God values every single human life. Just how much he loves each and every one of us. No matter how much we have messed up, no matter our problems, or the sin that plagues us each and every day. So much so that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

And even as bad as it gets here, for those of us who believe, we know the end of our life here is not the end of the story. Our hope is not built on this life, but the next. Which is the only thing which can give hope to the loved ones of James Roll, Dorwin Stoddard, Dorothy Morris, Gabe Zimmerman, Phyllis Schneck, Christina-Taylor Green.

Yet, Christina's life lives on, not only in the memories of those who knew her, but also as her parents made the decision to donate her eyes and her organs so that other children, other humans, may have life, and have it to the full. The full extent we don't know as of yet, but she gave so others can live. Similar to the story of Jason Ray: [Video Clip of Jason Ray story](#)

We love because God first loved us. We give because God first gave to us. We can give back in many ways. We can during our life here on earth through the donation of blood. We can when our life here on earth ends - through the donation of our organs, tissues, eyes, and even our bodies for research as some in our congregation have done. All it takes is expressing your desires to your loved ones, or even better filling out a form - and sending it in so you get registered in the donor bank and it appears on your driver's license. The truth is, as far as we have come in organ donation, more than 100,000 people are waiting for an organ to be donated and eighteen people die in this country each and every day as they are waiting.