

2018 Spring Bible Study – Act Justly

Week 4: Acting Justly for the Sanctity of All Life

Written by Rev. Reginald Smith

Director of Race Relations and Social Justice

Office of Social Justice for the CRCNA



Introduction

Abortion. The word conjures up familiar images and powerful emotions. Christian protesters picket Planned Parenthood facilities with accusatory placards of “murder,” “baby killers,” and “God’s wrath upon the doctors’ of death.” On the other side, counter protesters shout back with statements such as “a woman has a right to her body,” “Roe v Wade is law” or “it’s just a fetus.”

Who’s right? Who’s wrong? What’s the just way to think and act about this controversial issue? We have no better guide than the writer of Psalm 139. The psalm was sang and prayed as sacred conversation in the context of worship. David does not bottle up his emotions before God. He accepted himself to be totally human with the God who formed and made him. Let’s allow David to be our director for this journey.

Reading the Word Read Psalm 139 with your group. (Each person can take a verse.)

- ¹ You have searched me, LORD,
and you know me.
- ² You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.
- ³ You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.
- ⁴ Before a word is on my tongue
you, LORD, know it completely.
- ⁵ You hem me in behind and before,
and you lay your hand upon me.
- ⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain.
- ⁷ Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
- ⁸ If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
- ⁹ If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
¹⁰ even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.
- ¹¹ If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,”
¹² even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.
- ¹³ For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother’s womb.
- ¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.
- ¹⁵ 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.
- ¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written in your book
before one of them came to be.
- ¹⁷ How precious to me are your thoughts,^[a] God!
How vast is the sum of them!
- ¹⁸ Were I to count them,
they would outnumber the grains of sand—
when I awake, I am still with you.
- ¹⁹ If only you, God, would slay the wicked!
Away from me, you who are bloodthirsty!
- ²⁰ They speak of you with evil intent;
your adversaries misuse your name.
- ²¹ Do I not hate those who hate you, LORD,
and abhor those who are in rebellion against you?
- ²² I have nothing but hatred for them;
I count them my enemies.
- ²³ Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
- ²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.

Responding to the Word

The eyes of God (v.1-6) Do you know what a docent does? A docent is a trained guide who works in a museum of visitors. This person points out works of art or other exhibits to the untrained eye. Without a docent to assist those of us who do not know good art from bad art, we miss the finer points of beauty and technique. God’s eyes are trained to see David accurately. The Lord has done a full and complete body, heart, spirit and soul diagnosis of the king. David bears witness that the search was through (v.1), God’s observations are undisputed (v.2-5) and his analysis of David needs no second opinion (v.6) Every life, at no matter the stage of life, is viewed through the trained eyes of the Master Creator.

The face of God (v.7-12) When we look at life through the lens of the Bible, hiding from God is never successful. David attempts to disappear from the face of God like Adam and Eve trying to cover themselves with fig leaves. Hiding does not cover shame. The cave of darkness David believed would do the trick of hiding from God turned out to be a spotlight. The spotlight of the face of God was there with a loving glance of acceptance. God reminded the downhearted king he was still pro-David.

God is pro-life at every stage of human life. Every person deserves all the basic elements for human flourishing (food, housing, clean, education, safety, justice). Children growing in the nestle of a mother's womb. A senior citizen in a care-facility. An inmate in prison. Refugees desperate for a place to lay their heads. Every single person deserves worth, value, and respect. God is not just anti-abortion, He's pro-life through every stage of life and for every person. He will search for us no matter if in the womb, in class, or on the street, until the final breath is taken.

Noticing the handiwork of God (v.15-20). By grace, David imagined the creational work of God pulling together nerves, blood vessels, and brain tissue with artistic joy and wonder. God did this work of human birth with great attention and fierce love through the auspices of love between two persons. No life, under God's watchful work, is targeted as second rate or some mistake. Each conception is blessed with limitations and strengths, nothing more nor nothing less.

1. Taking a good look at yourself, what do you thank God for today? What is a lovely thing that God may see in you?
2. How can we show gratitude for God's handiwork in our lives?
3. What do you see in someone else in the group for which you are thankful?

What practical things can we do this week to honor God's beauty in others?

Here are some ideas:

- Compliment a stranger
- Write a blessing on social media (we need more blessings on social media!)
- Pay it forward for someone
- Spend time with friends praying for those with an unplanned pregnancies as they consider their options
- Give money to a church working with urban youth
- Encourage one senior citizen (Raybrook Care Facility is across Burton from Calvin; go over and visit!)
- Offer an evening free child-care to a family who needs it
- Pray for one pregnancy ministry (Pregnancy Resource Center in Grand Rapids is one idea)
- Pray for all who have had abortions to know the love and grace of God
- Pray a prayer of forgiveness for an enemy
- Visit a church nursery and pray for or with children
- Talk and pray with a person with a disability

A Closing Prayer

God of all goodness,

You have entrusted us with the gift of life. Help us to appreciate that gift from the first moments of conception to the last breaths of old age. Send your strength to all those who defend the unborn, the weak, the imprisoned, and the dying against attempts to cut short their lives. May your Holy Spirit touch the hearts of all who are tempted to choose the way of death rather than life. Grant that you people may always be a sign of your love in the world. Amen. ¹

¹ Adapted from "A Pro-life Prayer," by Creative Communications for the Parish © 1996