



“You Shall Not Murder”

Exodus 20:13

“Kevin, You Can Be Jesus”

Recently I told my congregation about a young mom who was making

pancakes for sons David, age 7, and Kevin, age 5. As the boys were arguing over who would get the first pancake, mom saw an opportunity to teach a spiritual lesson. “What do you think Jesus would do?” she asked, then answered her own question: “I think He would say to his brother, ‘You can go first, I will wait.’” David immediately turned to his brother and said, “Kevin, you can be Jesus.” It is always much easier to let someone else act like Jesus than to do the complicated work of putting others first.

Our congregation recently began exploring the implications of the 10 Commandments for life in a 21st-century culture, and it has been challenging, to say the least. This past Sunday we explored the 6th Commandment, “You Shall Not Murder.”

On a visit to Washington, DC, last month, I was surprised to come across a memorial to the 681,000+ individuals who have lost their lives to COVID. Each small white flag represented a person, and as we walked among them, we grieved for the families who have lost loved ones.



We had a similar response when innocent lives were taken as a result of the violence, trauma, and carnage of a terrorist attack at the gates of Kabul airport. Here in South Carolina we experienced a comparable sense loss back in June 2015 when nine parishioners were killed during an evening prayer meeting at Mother Emmanuel Church in Charleston.

As a society we believe that life is sacred. “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.” As a nation, we are committed to the belief that from the unique gift of life flows liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

The first book of the Bible tells us that we are made of the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27), and thus life is sacred. It is to be treasured and cherished. Yet it is not always treated as such.

A Definite Maybe

How would you counsel a 32-year-old mother of three children under 5, who is currently attending medical school and has just discovered she is expecting child number four? Her husband was told last week that his job is coming to an end, and she has confided to you that they are not sure they can cope and are considering an abortion. How do you respond? What do you say?

It is one thing to agree with the principle of the sanctity of life, but it is quite another when you have to wrestle with the complicated and difficult questions, such as “What is life?” and “When does life begin?”

Abortion is a sensitive and controversial subject resulting in passionate, emotionally charged discussions that generate more heat than light. Yet the question at the epicenter of the issue asks, “Is the fetus in the womb a life, or is it simply an undifferentiated mass of tissue?”

Despite the complex and controversial issues surrounding the question of life in the womb, science is clear on the following:

- Approximately 21 days following conception, the fetus develops a heart, which begins to pump blood approximately 28 days after conception.
- During the fourth week following conception, the lungs, jawbone, and nasal cavity begin to develop, and the hands and feet develop small buds that eventually become fingers and toes.
- In the fifth week cells start to take on specific functions. Blood cells, kidney cells, and nerve cells develop; the baby’s external features begin to form; the brain, spinal cord, and heart begin to develop; and the gastrointestinal tract starts to form.

- Weeks six to seven see arm and leg buds start to grow. The baby’s brain forms into five different areas. Some cranial nerves are visible. Eyes and ears begin to form. The baby’s heart continues to grow and now beats at a regular rhythm. Blood pumps through the main vessels.
- In week eight, arms and legs have grown longer; hands and feet begin to form and look like little paddles. The baby’s brain continues to grow, and the lungs start to form.
- In week nine, the baby’s nipples and hair follicles form. Arms grow and elbows develop, toes can be seen, and essential organs have begun to grow.

Most significant, the entire genetic code—which determines a person’s physical characteristics (height, face shape, hair and eye color)—is established at the point of conception. From the very beginning, the fetus is a human child, and the child’s humanity is verifiable in every cell of the body. Science is not in doubt that life exists in the womb, the genetic code is intact, brainwaves are evident, and a heartbeat exists.

So how do we respond to those parents who find themselves expecting a baby but are hurting and fearful about what the future holds?

When we focus on the sanctity of human life, we are called upon to look after the rights of the life in the womb, as well as looking after the life of the parents involved. Beginning with crisis pregnancy care, moral education on the nature and priority of life, highlighting the real possibility of adoption, and prayerful personal support for both baby and parents can make a significant difference for everyone involved. Such care demands that we are willing to “be Jesus” when someone else is at the point of their deepest need.

Genuine heartfelt love, care, sensitivity, and compassion for those wrestling with the option of abortion and for those who have been emotionally wounded and continue to grieve the loss of their child is what we are called to. Above all, remember that God does not abandon us to the emotion of the moment or the poor choices of the past. He is always there for us and will not give up on us, for He is committed to the sanctity of life that He sees in us.