

Life Sunday Sermon 2021

1 Corinthians 12:22 “From Invisible to Indispensable”

Rev. Jonathan Lange, Pastor, St. Paul Lutheran Church, Kemmerer, Wyoming, and Our Saviour Lutheran Church, Evanston, Wyoming, and 3rd Vice President, Wyoming District LCMS
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“On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable” (1 Corinthians 12:22).

There are a thousand different reasons that something can be invisible. It may be hidden from sight by some barrier or across a vast distance. Sometimes things are just too tiny. An atom or molecule, even most living cells, cannot be seen with the naked eye. Sometimes things are invisible because they are camouflaged. They blend into the background. Others are hiding in plain sight. We look at it. We see it, but not really. For, our eyes are expecting it to look different than it does. Then, there is the mental block. It has nothing to do with its size, location, or unexpected form. There are simply some things that we don't want to look at. The proverb goes: “There are none so blind as those who will not see.” All the other kinds of invisibility can be cured. This one cannot—without a change of heart.

On Sanctity of Life Sunday, all these forms of invisibility are in view. At the very beginning of life, size is the issue. Your first moment was as a single cell—a zygote one tenth of a millimeter across. Barriers were also an issue. Layers deep in the body of your mother you were hidden. Thirdly, there was your unfamiliar form. Even if we could peer through skin and into the womb, even if we could magnify your size, your shape was not at all like it is today. You would not look at all like our typical image of a person.

As you grew in size, your form also changed. From a round sphere, you came to resemble a mulberry. Then by the fifth day, you had a few hundred cells that looked like a balloon filled with water. It took you growing for five weeks before the first hint of an eye or any protrusions that could be identified as arms or legs were visible. It took two more weeks before you had fingers and toes.

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By worldly standards, you were not recognizably human until this point. But from your own point of view, through all these different appearances, you were still you. You could always say to God, “You knitted me together in my mother’s womb” (Psalm 139:13). Invisible, yes. But not to God. And not to your brothers and sisters who know Him—and you—by faith.

In the Bible, to be seen is to be saved.

The Psalmist says, “My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth” (Psalm 139:15). When Isaiah prays for God’s mercy, he says, “Look down from heaven and see” (Isaiah 65:15). God told Moses, “I have surely seen the affliction of My people ...” (Exodus 3:7). And so, He worked His salvation.

This is not only true of God, but it is also true of our neighbors. When people do not see us, we are in grave danger. And when we do not see other people, we can accidentally hurt them or blindly withhold our love and care from them. That’s why, throughout our lives, we do things to make ourselves visible to one another. We put orange flags on trikes and bikes to make kids safer. Safety cones and strobe lights multiply all around. All of us do things to be noticed. Hair, clothing, achievements—even mis-achievements—are motivated by a desire to be seen by our peers, by our parents, and by people that we value.

It should go without saying—but we must say it anyway—that it is not only the small and young who can suffer from invisibility. The elderly, the poor, the sick, the addicted, those who are struggling with sin right before our eyes can be out of sight, out of mind. We see them, but we don’t see them. Sometimes because they are good at hiding. Sometimes because we just don’t want to see.

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That’s why the Psalmist says, “Blessed is the one who considers the poor!” (Psalm 41:1).

To be a For Life people is to be a congregation that notices the smallest, the oldest, the weakest, and the neediest. We are called to notice physical needs as well as spiritual needs—the need to be protected from physical harm and from spiritual harm. We should consider our neighbor’s needs to be healed in body, mind, and spirit—to be forgiven and restored.

The flip side of our obligation to “consider the poor” is that when we are blind to any person’s existence or need, we are sinning against that person and against Jesus who made that person. Whether she is a snowflake baby only two tenths of a millimeter across and frozen in liquid nitrogen, or a full grown woman who is suffering the pain of a sin she cannot even admit to herself, God’s people see, and God’s people care. Whether she is bereft of family and alone in a nursing home, or a young mother surrounded by children and struggling with depression, God’s people see, and God’s people care.

That means consciously taking off the blinders.

Examine your own heart to find those sins that are preventing you from seeing your neighbor. Are you self-absorbed and unwilling to be bothered? Our world is filled with false philosophies that deny the value of human life at its weakest stages—both old and young. It is easy to use empty rhetoric as a cover for disengagement from the discourse. We can shrug our shoulders and pretend that the question is just too complicated to come to a conclusion ... “always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:7).

Does your desire for the praise of men keep you from defending the lives of others? This is a powerful temptation. We are well-acquainted with the social shaming that happens when we stand up for life and marriage. Many a Christian is drawn away from the faith by stifling his

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public confession of the truth of God. He thinks that he can hold it secretly without getting into public controversy. But bit by bit the truth is driven out until he no longer believes it, even in his heart.

Maybe it is unconfessed sin in your own life that holds you back from speaking up to warn your neighbor against the same sin. Maybe, it is your own dark episode that is just too painful to face that keeps you from being a voice for the voiceless. God does not want you to live with that pain. Jesus earnestly desires for you to give it wholly to Him so that your guilt and shame are completely washed away, and you are healed.

That’s why we repent.

Repentance is not a work of self-harm. It is an opportunity for deep cleansing and deep healing. Such healing repentance seeks the blood of Christ to heal us from all sins. Jesus’ blood not only takes away guilt, it also takes away the shame of sin. Jesus heals everything about us, including blinded eyes that keep us from seeing our neighbors. That’s why seeing your own sin is the first step in having your eyes opened to see your neighbor.

When we frankly repent of ourselves, we recognize what St. John the apostle writes about all of us. “Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared” (1 John 3:2). It’s true! We are not, yet, what we will be. We are small, immature, sick, and broken. But we are also children of God! What an incredibly beautiful passage! We are God’s children even now! Even while we are so far from full maturity.

God does not wait until you have reached full maturity as a Christian before He acknowledges you as His own child. There is no threshold of Christian size or maturity before you have the full rights of the sons of God. There is no vague and fuzzy line between a “baby

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Christian” and a “real Christian.” By Baptism God the Father “begot you from above,” (cf. John 3:3). That makes you a full member of the family of God immediately and without qualification.

There is a direct analogy, here, to members of the human family. Becoming human is not a matter of size, strength, place, or usefulness. People don’t grow into human beings. Nor do they gradually weaken into non-human “vegetables.” People are created whole and entire by being begotten, and they remain people created in the image of God for eternity. When we look at a zygote or a blastocyst, we have a difficult time seeing the humanity of our neighbor. He or she is so extremely immature in comparison to our own body that his value is known only by faith.

But when we consider our elder brother, Jesus, He is so perfect and mature in comparison to us that we do not even compare to where He is in maturity and stature. As wildly different as a zygote is from an adult, even more wildly different are you from Jesus. And yet, He sees you and cares for you as a full-fledged child of God. He does not devalue you because you have not yet appeared in full maturity. “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are” (1 John 3:1). So we are! Let that sink in. So we are.

Even though you are spiritually tiny and invisible in comparison to your older brother, Jesus sees you and recognizes you as His own brother. He gives you His full attention. He values you so highly as to give His own life for your life. He knows that His Father knitted you together for a specific purpose out of sheer “fatherly, divine goodness and mercy” (SC II.1). So, He also gladly gives you His mercy and grace. He does not see you as a life to be tossed aside. He nurtures you, protects you, heals you, and attends to your every need.

He sees you as utterly indispensable.

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You are indispensable to the Father, and therefore you are indispensable to His only begotten Son. If you had been the only sinner in the entire world, still Jesus would have seen you. Still Jesus would die for you. When you could do absolutely nothing to protect yourself from the deadly assaults of the devil, Jesus offered Himself in your stead and died in your place. That is the foundation of your life in God. And it changes everything about how you see the world. For, now that Jesus Christ is your true brother and you are a true Child of God, you are given to see the world as Jesus sees the world.

Every person who is living, from the oldest to the youngest, is living for one reason and one reason only. God Himself wills that life. God decided to bring that person into existence. God Himself decided to give that person one more heartbeat, one more breath, one more day, one more year. And whatever God wills is the best and greatest gift. Life is not only a gift to the one who lives. That person's life is also God's gift to you and God's gift to the entire world. Just as you have gone from invisible to indispensable, God the Holy Spirit has given you new eyes to see your every neighbor. And in seeing them as they truly are, they are no longer invisible but indispensable.

Satan is forever trying to blind us to the manifold gifts of God. But the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to see. On Easter Sunday, “When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him” (Luke 24:30-31). So, also, are your eyes opened in the breaking of the bread. To partake of the Holy Body of Christ is to be given Jesus' eyes.

When God opens our eyes to see the world as it truly is, we no longer see our brothers and sisters as burdens and responsibilities. We see them as gifts—precious and indispensable.

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And every time you see your neighbor in this way, you are reminded that God so sees you. You have moved from invisible to indispensable. From worthless to invaluable. From unseen to seen. God sees you. He sees you in your immaturity. He sees you in your sickness and sin. He sees you in your guilt and shame. And He does not avert His eyes from you but turns His heart to you. He spends everything He is and everything that He has to protect you, to heal you, to forgive you.

God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit gave you life and existence in the first place. He wants you to live. He made you to live. He is the one keeping you alive even today.

He then sent His only begotten Son into the flesh to suffer, to die, and to rise again for your redemption and forgiveness. He does so because He wants you to live with Him. “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live” (Ezekiel 33:11). Jesus died that you might live!

In Baptism He gave you His Holy Spirit and placed you into the Church because He wants you to live forever with His entire family. Life is holy because God is holy. And every life He gives, both now and in eternity, is a gift of the Holy God, the Lord and giver of Life. AMEN.