

Summer 2020 Sunday Adult Bible Class: Life Issues

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For Pilgrim Lutheran Church, Kilgore, TX

Introduction:

- This past “Sanctity of Human Life Sunday”, January 19, 2020, my mother and I were attending Grace Lutheran Church, Little Rock, Arkansas, where we participated in a one-Sunday Bible Study distributed by the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod titled “I Came That They May Have Life” (linked at <https://www.lcms.org/life-ministry/life-sunday-resources>). The Study’s discussion barely touched the tip of the iceberg, and she and I both thought a series of classes would provide better opportunities both to study Holy Scripture and to understand life issues. However, for all the resources that the Synod and its “Pro-Life Partner” Lutherans for Life (a Recognized Service Organization [RSO] of the Synod) produce and provide, there was no single resource available covering a range of life issues and spanning something like a 13-week quarter. This Adult Bible Class endeavors both to cover a range of life issues and to do so over the course of the 13-week Summer quarter of our Adult Bible Class.
- The topic “Life Issues” is certainly broad and could be taken to include any number of sub-topics. A preliminary outline of this Adult Bible Class by topic and weeks anticipates this initial session of Introduction and treatment of Scripture & Life, followed by sessions on the following sub-topics: Life Created, Redeemed, and Sanctified; Marriage & Parenthood; Abortion (likely two sessions); Adoption (likely two sessions); Life under the Cross; Coronavirus; End of Life (likely two sessions); Faithfully Confessing; and Lutherans for Life and a Conclusion. Other matters can and will be taken up under those headings along the way.
- May 31-August 23 provides 13 Sundays, and presently I am not planning to take any of those off. Should I end up taking one or more Sundays off, someone else would lead the Adult Bible Class either on this or another topic (either consuming one or more of the Sundays for this topic or pushing further into August or September our completion of the topic). We are not slavishly bound to the preliminary outline, so you should feel free to ask questions and to discuss something until at least the majority are satisfied, but keep in mind that we are nevertheless at least somewhat desirous of completing the course before the new Sunday School year begins August 30.

Scripture & Life:

- Is there such a thing as truth? From where did that question come? Is the question old or new? How are we plagued by the question “Did God really say ...?”?
Genesis 3:1-5
John 18:33-38
John 14:4-6
John 14:16-17, 26 (confer John 15:26; 16:13; 1 Corinthians 2:12-14;
1 John 2:27; 4:6; 5:6)
(See further pp.3 and 6 of *LifeDate*, Winter 2019, and Rev. Michael Saleminck’s sermon for Sanctity of Human Life Sunday 2020 titled “Did God Really Say?”.)

- What are potential or possible authoritative sources of truth on life issues? Is our secular culture one of life or death? Does popular culture with its songs and stories, vocabulary and rhetoric, rituals and symbols, habits and outfits affirm life or death? Do those things more frequently give voice to the devil, the world, and our sinful nature than they do to the law and Gospel of God? Do they frustrate our efforts to speak the truth in love with the songs and stories, vocabulary and rhetoric, rituals and symbols, habits and outfits of the Church? (See Rev. Michael Salemink, “A Culture of Life”, *LifeDate*, Spring 2020, p.3.)
- Holy Scripture is Divinely inspired and therefore inerrant. Holy Scripture as a result/also has four “other” properties/attributes that are worth remembering: *authority* (in all that it says Scripture is entitled to the same faith and obedience that is due God), *efficacy* (Scripture effects things that far exceed human power, such as creation and conversion), *perfection/sufficiency* (Scripture teaches everything that men must know to obtain salvation), and *perspicuity* (Scripture presents in language that can be understood by all whatever people must know to be saved). Specifically relevant regarding our Life Issues Adult Bible Class is that God’s Word is authoritative in such matters even if it does not teach explicitly regarding such things as some or even many of the specific modern technologies relevant to life issues (for example, RU486 [mifepristone], in vitro fertilization, stem cells, respirators, and the like). Holy Scripture’s general principles can be applied legitimately to specific modern examples, and Holy Scripture’s specific examples can be used legitimately to “induce” general principles that in turn are likewise applied to specific modern examples.
- Holy Scripture’s primary purpose is to save us by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, the Gospel! Yet, even as the Holy Spirit can use Holy Scripture as law that leads us sinners to recognize our sin (usually numbered “second use” and remembered as “mirror”), a necessary condition for salvation (*sine qua non*), so also the Holy Spirit can use Holy Scripture as law to show us who are redeemed how to live our lives (usually numbered “third use” and remembered as “rule” or “guide”). Jesus alone keeps the law perfectly and makes up for our failures to keep it, and in Him alone are the tension between law and Gospel resolved.
John 20:31
Ephesians 2:8-10
2 Timothy 3:12-17 (NB: v.15 βρέφος [*brephos*], even an unborn child)
- What does Holy Scripture say about life issues? What do life issues lead us to learn from Holy Scripture? At some level the two questions, while similar, are not the same but can be taken as reflective of different theological approaches. As with last Summer’s “Last Things” Adult Bible Class, although this summer we are proceeding by “life issue” and examining the relevant passages of Holy Scripture, ultimately we are considering what Holy Scripture says about life issues. (You may recall the usual four-fold division of theology: exegetical, systematic/dogmatic, historical, and practical; we are proceeding systematically/dogmatically but also exegetically, historically, and practically.) Different approaches have different advantages and disadvantages. Scripture passages may appear to be used as “proof texts”, but they are, of course, much more than “proof texts” (that is, they are the Word of God that speaks law and Gospel into our lives and powerfully effects our very salvation).

Life created, redeemed, and sanctified:

- Last Sunday we introduced our Summer 2020 Sunday Adult Bible Class topic “Life Issues” and considered the relationship between Holy Scripture and Life. This Sunday, after a brief note about terminology, we consider human life as created, redeemed, and sanctified by God. (As we have discussed previously, while we may consider the Apostolic and Nicene Creed’s three articles pertaining to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit under the headings of creation, redemption, and sanctification, each of those three works of God directed out from the essence of the Godhead itself towards the world are not strictly divided or attributed to any of the Divine Persons individually but to all three Persons corporately.)
- As we see below, God creates human kind’s *life* as consisting of body and soul (last Summer in our ‘Last Things’ study we defined *temporal death* as the *separation* of the soul/spirit from the body, the unnatural disruption of the union of soul/spirit and body created by God to be one, and we noted that neither the soul/spirit nor the body is *annihilated* in temporal or *eternal death*). A trichotomy of body, soul, and spirit is not sufficiently supported. Somewhat complicating our understanding of the Holy Scripture’s teaching is that both the Old Testament’s Hebrew and the New Testament’s Greek can use the same single word to refer either to the soul/spirit distinct from the body or to the life as a whole:

soul/spirit: Psalm 16:10: נֶפֶשׁ (*nephesh*)

Acts 2:27: ψυχή (*psuche*)

creature/being: Genesis 2:7: נֶפֶשׁ (*nephesh*)

1 Corinthians 15:45: ψυχή (*psuche*)

Context usually helps make clear the specific meaning that is intended.

- Human life was and is created by God. Life is not of our own doing.

Genesis 1:26-31 (confer Acts 17:24-25)

We note the image of God (intellect and will rightly disposed), the evidence of the Trinity, intended dominion (twice), male and female sexes (by God’s creation, not an individual’s choice), related command to be fruitful-multiply-fill-subdue the earth (whenever that may or may not have been satisfied), vegetarian diet (at least initially), animals’ also having the breath of life (though not the image of God or *rational* soul), and the creation’s assessment as “very good”.

Genesis 2:7-8, 18-25

In the first portion, we note the unique formation of the man from dust, the breath of life (נִשְׁמָה, *nashamah*, frequently combined with *ruah* [“spirit”] and seemingly synonymous with *nephesh*), and the “living creature”. In the second portion, we note v.19’s use of *nephesh* (“creature”), the “helper fit” for the man, the unique building of the woman, and the “re-union” of the two in the one-flesh union of marriage (in Matthew 19:3-6, for example, Jesus took the creation account and the indissoluble marriage bond seriously), and the lack of shame. While God created the first man and woman immediately/directly, He creates all subsequent people mediately/indirectly, through the means of our biological parents as a secondary cause (in some sense, regardless of where and how fertilization takes place, although cloning and gene-editing techniques such as the CRISPR technology push the envelope [see *LifeDate* Fall 2019 p.20]) Thus, we hold as “probably correct” the idea that not only our bodies but also our souls are so created mediately (traducianism, as opposed to creationism, God’s creating the souls immediately). God created the first man and woman *perfect*, but we know that

they soon succumbed to temptation and brought into the world sin and its consequences, including distorted relationships, corrupted future life, and death (evolution did not bring death), but they did not remove all significance to human beings' having been created in the image of God (theologians differ on the extent of the image, if any, that remains after the fall).

Genesis 5:3 (confer Psalm 51:5)

Genesis 9:6

James 3:9

- Human life was and is redeemed by God. God created human life; the woman and the man brought death; but the God-man brought life again.

1 Corinthians 15:21-22 (confer Romans 5:12-21)

Whether the expressions in English are resurrecting the dead and making alive or forgiving, justifying, saving, all are in some sense the same as redeeming (the OT in Hebrew and NT in Greek also have a number of words for each English term).

Job 33:28 (while we were ungodly enemies, Romans 5:6, 10)

Lamentations 3:58 (confer Psalm 34:22; 72:14; 103:4; 119:54)

Jesus paid the price for every person's original and actual sins.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (note the implication for the next bullet, sanctification)

Jesus's death objectively redeemed all (His atonement was not limited), although not all are subjectively redeemed by receiving His free gift in repentance and faith. Nevertheless, viewed from the perspective of universal objective redemption, those who are not subjectively redeemed do not have less value.

- Human life was and is sanctified by God. God alone births a new, holy life.

John 1:12-13

John 3:3-7 (the Greek ἄνωθεν [*anōthen*] in vv.3 and 7 can be "from above")

Romans 8:9-11

1 Corinthians 6:11

Colossians 3:9-11 (confer Ephesians 4:20-24 and 2 Corinthians 3:18)

Titus 3:3-7

While we can speak of sanctification (making holy) in a wider sense that includes conversion and justification, here we are primarily speaking of it in a narrower sense that focuses especially on our leading a godly life evident by good works. While nonbelievers at least could be sanctified (or are potentially sanctifiable), we are talking here primarily of believers. And, for the purposes of this Life Issues study, we might think especially in terms of our, according to our vocations, performing the good works of the Fifth and Sixth Commandments, those honoring God's gift of life and human sexuality, respectively. And, we should think not only of not committing "murder" and "adultery" in thought, word, and deed, but also of such things as our not abusing spouses or children, ourselves using harmful substances, and our hating or slandering other groups, as well as pre-marital sex, pornography, and self-pollution (see Benjamin T. G. Mayes' chapter in *From Taboo to Delight: Ethics of Sex* [St. Louis: CPH, 2017]).

- From its very beginning to its never-ending, every human life is equally valuable, because God created it, in Christ has redeemed it, and by the power of the Holy Spirit at least potentially sanctifies it. So significant are these works of the Triune God that they give value even to a believer's earthly remains (see, for example, the Committal formula in *Lutheran Service Book: Agenda*, p. 130). Before a believer's earthly life comes to an end, however, there usually are at least opportunities for marriage and parenthood, our next "Life Issues" topic.

Marriage & Parenthood:

- On the two previous Sundays, we introduced our Life Issues class, explored the relationships between Holy Scripture and Life Issues, and considered Life as created, redeemed, and sanctified. Particularly relevant for our purposes today is our recalling from last Sunday God’s creating in His image the *human* kind, either male or female (an unusual kind that is both one and two), His “re-uniting” them in a one-flesh union (not independent but interdependent [1 Corinthians 11:11-12], and in some sense equal but not interchangeable), and His blessing and charging them, among other things, to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1:26-31; 2:7-8, 18-25). Today, after a few words about the lead-up to marriage, we in turn discuss marriage and parenthood.
- God created the first man and woman complete, they did not need to “grow up” from childhood, “date” or “choose” a spouse, or even get engaged to be married, for God provided the woman as a helper fit for the man (Genesis 2:18-25). That couple’s descendants to some extent would deal at least with some of those things and have marital relationships that later would be proscribed (for example, Leviticus 18:6-18; forbidden are both what are usually called degrees of consanguinity [vertical blood lines] and degrees of affinity [horizontal blood or kinship relations established by marriage]). Despite cultural suggestions to the contrary, there are biological differences between the sexes (arguably more than the absence or presence of a Y chromosome, yet determined at conception even if not anatomically distinct until later), and there are implications from those differences. Referring to “gender” as distinct from “sex” apparently came from 1970-1980’s feminists attempting to deny a lack of difference between the sexes, seeing gender as a fluid spectrum, in contrast to sex as a binary biological attribute. Another word issue is the rise of “men” and “woman” as adjectives instead of “male” and “female”. Male and female roles relate to Christ and the Church, which Christ-Church relationship the male-female relationship reflects, so perhaps there is little surprise that the devil attacks human sexuality with such intensity. The Bible narrates God’s creating and His expectations for the primary vocations of husband and wife; parents, father and mother, and children, son and daughter (confer Rev. J. David Wende’s study “The Proverbial Family”, *Life Studies: Volume One*, pp.74-75). Although a case can be made for “arranged” marriages and love’s developing afterwards (Genesis 24’s account of Rebekah’s being provided for Isaac, especially v.67), more often today people look to fall into love (or “lust”) before marriage, ignoring not only what Biblical love is but also what God expects from us in terms both of marrying someone of the same faith (1 Corinthians 7; 2 Corinthians 6:14) and of sexual purity and chastity, including modesty in dress and behavior (recalling Genesis 2:25; 3:7, 10-11, 21).

1 Timothy 2:8-15

Marital relationships play a role in salvation from Eve to Mary and beyond.

- Marriage notably was created before the fall as part of God’s good will for human flourishing. The man initially needed the woman to “help” procreate, and after the fall marriage has the in-some-sense-added purposes of being, as *The Book of Common Prayer* marriage rite puts it, a remedy against sin and a way to avoid fornication. We may think more about what God says we are *not* to do in regards to sex, marriage, and parenthood, but that does not mean that there are not plenty of things God gives for and enables us *to* do in these same regards (confer Rev. Michael Salemink’s “Did God Really Say Yes to Sex?” in *LifeDate*, Winter 2019, pp.8-9). We remember that, when

we fall short of His proscriptions and prescriptions, with repentance and faith we live in His forgiveness of sins for Christ’s sake, remembering also both that in some sense repentance includes the desire to do better and that forgiveness should bring forth from us at the least beginnings of our keeping God’s Commandments. Although the coming of the Savior arguably changed at least in part the normal expectations (confer Matthew 19:11-12; 1 Corinthians 7:1, 7, 27, 31-32, 38; and Apology of the Augsburg Confession XXIII:38, 69), generally people will be married (and married once, one man and one woman, arguably for eternal life; no simultaneous, serial, or polygamy of any sort, despite Biblical examples of polygyny as “exceptions”, distinct from polyandry or polyamory). Love between married couples builds upon sexual relations but is not the same as and does not depend on sexual relations. The emotional attachment of love and the attraction of sexual desire are distinct, though sexual attraction can be a primary initial bond while emotional attachment grows. Love between husbands and wives reflects the love between Christ and the Church.

Ephesians 5:22-33 (quoting Genesis 2:24)

We note the created order and the resulting headship and the husband’s self-sacrificingly loving his wife and her submitting herself to his headship and respecting him. Biblically speaking, sexual pleasure is not the highest goal of marriage or intercourse itself, nor does sexual pleasure determine one’s personal identity. Husband and wife communicate intimate knowledge via sexual relations and thereby also affirm their distinctiveness, complementary-ness, and one-flesh unity, which one-flesh unity is arguably “incarnate” in the children the sexual relations may produce, in keeping with God’s original blessing and charge.

- God alone can be said to open (Genesis 29:31; 30:22) and to close wombs (Genesis 20:18; 1 Samuel 1:5, 6). People should not necessarily regularly intervene in working either against or for conception, especially as some practices in either direction militate against not only the creation of but also created life and arguably try to take on God’s role in the process and separate marriage and conception. (All the more in either reproductive or therapeutic cloning by any name.) While life is promoted, couples who are unable to conceive or who lose children to such things as miscarriage and stillbirth are comforted in their grief and not incomplete, as God’s purposes still obtain for them, perhaps including adoption. While the effects of sin may make it difficult or impossible for some marriages to have children, what should not interfere are ungodly fear and mistaken priorities and false presuppositions about a necessary standard of living, such things as homes, cars, phones, and multiple jobs to pay for them. Once a family has children, as much as possible Christian parents should raise them as Christian children and work to instill life values in them (see suggestions in *LifeDate*, Winter 2019, pp.10-12) and, with that in mind, also carefully control and contextualize media that come into the home (see movie and book suggestions in *LifeDate*, Spring 2020, pp.6-7, 10-11), and prepare their children for—if not opt out of—secular sex education or secular education altogether.
- God’s law and Gospel speak to all of us regarding sexuality, marriage, and parenthood, whether in the traditional nuclear family or any of its modern variations. The same is true when it comes to the Life Issue of abortion, to be treated likely the next two times.

Abortion:

- On previous Sundays, we have introduced our Life Issues class; explored the relationships between Holy Scripture and Life Issues; considered Life as created, redeemed, and sanctified; and discussed Marriage and Parenthood. Particularly relevant for our purposes today is our recalling that God creates human life mediately, usually through our biological parents, with soul and body joined, and so a person existing, from the very first moment (from the womb; Isaiah 44:2a; 49:1, 5; Jeremiah 1:5—what is true of the prophets in some sense is no less true of us). We also recall the general distinction between contraceptives and birth control and the similar moral implications of both. Today (and next week) we begin discussing the particular form of birth control we call abortion.
- When we refer to “abortion”, we tend to mean what others might more-precisely call “induced abortion” or “induced miscarriage” (in distinction from the ending of a pregnancy by removal or expulsion of the child *without* intervention that might be termed a “spontaneous abortion” or general “miscarriage”). Such induced abortions can be further delineated by when they occur (for example, “late-term abortion”). Modern methods of inducing abortions generally are medication or surgery (such as dilating the cervix and using a suction device). Historically, abortions apparently were attempted by using herbal medicines, sharp tools, forceful massage, and other traditional methods. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abortion.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abortion))
- To give you an idea of the scale of the problem, in 2019 more human beings died from abortions than from any other cause of death. The independent site Worldometers reports that worldwide that year there were more than 42.3 million deaths from abortions, in contrast to 58.6 million deaths from all other causes, including 8.2 million deaths from cancer, 5 million deaths from smoking, 13 million deaths from disease (presumably other diseases), 1.7 million from HIV/AIDS. Deaths by malaria and alcohol are also recorded. So, more than 42 million living human beings, in most cases with beating hearts, were violently destroyed in their mothers’ wombs. (See *LifeDate*, Spring 2020, p.20, citing LifeNews.com.)
- The question for many when it comes to the matter of abortion is when life begins, whether what/who is in the womb is an embryo/fetus or is a human-being/person. We might like clearer passages in regards to God’s forbidding abortion, but the following passages (in canonical order) attest to the person in the womb’s being valued as highly as the person out of the womb.
 - Exodus 21:22-25
Some wrongly think that the injury to the pregnant woman causes her to miscarry, and so the injury can only be to her, which interpretation gives more value to the life of the woman than to the life of the miscarried child, and so God is said not to condemn abortion. But, if the injury to the pregnant woman is rightly understood as causing premature birth, then the injury could be to her or to the child, which interpretation gives the same value to the woman and to the child, and so God does condemn abortion (killing of an unborn child is morally equivalent to killing someone born). (Confer Lamb, *Grounded*, 47-50.)
 - Judges 13:3-5
Perhaps the Pre-Incarnate Christ Himself (*the* Angel of the Lord) makes a birth announcement of a “savior” that pointed forward to Him, not unlike that birth announcement the angel Gabriel would later make to His own virgin mother (the

miraculous oxymoron prophesied of in Isaiah 7:14). “Conceive and bear a son” is repeated, albeit in a slightly different Hebrew construction. The Hebrew word יָלַד (*yalad*, bear, beget, bring forth) can be used narrowly of giving birth or more broadly. The two verbs together refer to the beginning and end of the birth process and arguably so also the whole of it. Whether or not we take “son” as the object of both verbs or only the latter verb, clearly the life created in conception and born (for the nine months or in delivery) is personal and individual.

- Psalm 22:9-10
God brings David, but ultimately more-importantly the Messiah, safely through childbirth and gives faith to rely on God throughout life. The holy authors do not know a distinction in themselves from before to after birth.
- Psalm 51:5
“Behold” links to the preceding and calls attention to a special point. “I” is the psalmist David but also each of us. “Brought forth” could be something like “writhed out” in labor. “Iniquity” is sin that incurs guilt and demands punishment. Progressive parallelism reverses the order and looks further back. “Sin” as missing the mark or being off target. “Conceive” of animal-like sex drive and conception used only here of a human being. “Me” as David/us, individual human beings/persons and sinful at that same moment of life’s beginning and so in need of a Savior. (Confer Westendorf, *Grounded*, 39-42.)
- Psalm 139:13-16
Much could be said about what the passage says about God’s creating David and each of us, but more-important for our purpose is what the passage says about God’s knowing individuals and their being people *while they are in the womb*. For example, note v.14’s parallel “my inward parts” and “me”. V.16’s “unformed substance” is usually taken as the embryonic state, but one wonders whether it could be taken as referring even earlier to one’s nothingness, which would fit both with the contrast of “the days that were formed” and with the parallel of “when as yet there were none of them” (elected, foreknown, predestined, called, justified, and glorified [Romans 8:29-30, for example]).
- Luke 1:26-38, 39-45
Perhaps on March 25, v.31 the Virgin Mary is told she “will conceive”, will “bear”, “will call”; v.32 that Son “will be great”, “will be called” the Son of God (because He is), and will be given (according to His human nature); v.33 He “will reign”, and His Kingdom will never end. The answer to Virgin Mary’s logistical question is that the Holy Spirit “will come” upon Mary, the Power of the Most High “will overshadow” her, so the Child “to be born will be called” (note the Trinity!). V.38 Mary consents, and the conception takes place (usually understood as taking place right then and there [some say the Second Person entered through her ear]). V.39 Mary (and Jesus!) go to see Elizabeth (and John!). Vv.42-43 the fruit of Mary’s womb (at that point perhaps smaller than the point of a needle!) is the Lord, and v.44 John (a βρέφος [*brefos*, an unborn or born child—not the only word so used]) responds, having been filled with the Holy Spirit in the womb as prophesied (v.15). (Confer Fehskens, *Grounded*, 43-46.)

In regards to life’s beginning at the moment of conception and being considered a fully-valued human life, worth noting is that “conception” was redefined in 1965 by the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) from being equivalent to “fertilization” to being regarded as “the completion of implantation” some ten to fourteen days later (see, for example, Harrison, *Taboo*, 86).

Abortion: (continued)

We have seen that from Biblical and medical perspectives human life begins at fertilization/conception. God knows such life before, during, and after the womb, and there is no difference in life's value between those stages. Intentionally expelling or removing that life is called "abortion" and caused more deaths worldwide, 42.3 million, than anything else in 2019. Such slaughter is condemned, though in Christ there is always hope, including for those considering and having had abortions.

- The Lord Jesus was once a human child and taught and demonstrated special love for children (for example, Matthew 19:14; 18:10). People who love and follow Jesus do their best to raise children, including those abandoned by the world (think of Christian orphanages, schools, and other ministries). When God's people turn away from Him, their idolatry (following whatever gods are elevated to the high places of the human heart) leads to infanticide (the practice of killing infants), child exploitation, and cruelty of every kind. A whole session could be spent looking only at infanticide as it relates to abortion, but key passages follow:

Exodus 1:15-22 (confer Acts 7:19 [βρέφη]; more on the midwives later)

Israel had been a target of a form of genocide, if not for religious reasons.

Leviticus 18:21

Molech was a Canaanite deity to whom children were sacrificed, heating a statue red hot and throwing screaming children into its arms (Chemosh was another).

Leviticus 20:1-5

Despite the seriousness of v.4, the warning was not heeded, and Israel imitated the unbelievers around them, with infanticide's becoming a common practice. First, the people rejected God as King and wanted a king like their surrounding nations.

1 Samuel 8:19-20 (confer Ezekiel 20, especially vv.26, 31)

Having taken foreign wives, King Solomon facilitated worship of Molech.

1 Kings 11:1-8

After Solomon, the divided kingdom was increasingly corrupt, north then south. En route to becoming king of Israel, Menahem killed his enemies' unborn babies.

2 Kings 15:16 (confer the Ammonites sin in Amos 1:13)

As king of Israel, Ahaz killed even his own son, and the people killed theirs.

2 Kings 16:3; 17:17 (confer the king of Edom's sacrifice in 2 Kings 17:31)

Ahaz's grandson Manasseh King of Judah also killed his own son(s).

2 Kings 21:6 (confer/compare 2 Chronicles 33:6)

Manasseh later repented.

2 Chronicles 33:12-13

Manasseh's good works followed (2 Chronicles 33:14-16), and so should ours.

Malachi 4:6

- I remember being struck as a seminary student by the fact that Early Church fathers condemned abortion (at the time I did not understand the Bible as well and apparently thought abortion was more of a modern problem). Among the Early Church's witnesses against abortion are the Epistle of Barnabas (*circa* 138 A.D.), the *Didache* (*circa* 150 A.D.), and Tertullian (*circa* 200 A.D.). The Jewish historian Josephus (37-c. 100 A.D.) noted that Christians' rejection of abortion and infanticide distinguished them from the Roman pagans, who commonly destroyed their children born with a disability or not of their desired sex.
- The value of life and prohibition of abortion are perhaps best understood as being without exception, though people frequently might "make exceptions" for rape, incest, and threats to the mother's physical life, generally without Biblical principle or example. In the case of rape and

incest, circumstances that bring about a new human life do not diminish its value. Society repelled by rape and incest may be served, but neither the mother nor her child is served. Pity combined with love is confident of God's good and gracious plan for both. In the case of a mother's threatened life, we do well to remember first that her child's equally-valued life is also threatened. Ectopic pregnancies, cancer, and cancer treatment may mean only one life can be saved here and now or both lives will be lost here and now. (Life of the mother cannot be taken so broadly that abortion is justified for any reason.) Mothers may willingly give their lives for their children, or their unborn children may be unintentionally killed as the result of efforts to save the physical life of the mother for other born children who need her love, nurture, and provision. The child's death then is not an exception to the prohibition of abortion but the unintended result of procedures to save the mother, though faith could trust that God will give love, nurture, and provision through other means. (Confer *Grounded*, pp.99-102 and pp.103-105.)

- More often than in cases of rape, incest, or the health of the mother, abortion is considered because of what are called “unplanned”, “surprise”, or “crisis” pregnancies. Of course, from God's perspective, in some sense no pregnancy is “unplanned”, and, even from a human perspective, since sexual intercourse may well lead to pregnancy, even despite contraceptive efforts, in that regard pregnancy can hardly be a “surprise”. Yet, when we think we alone are in control, pregnancy can bring a “crisis” that threatens to overwhelm us and impact the new human life God has created. With God's help through His Word and people that He uses, confusion and fear can give way to clarity and trust as we make good decisions in light of His plans for at least two of His people, not worrying about the future and letting the value of life outweigh what we misperceive as problems.
 Proverbs 14:12
 Deuteronomy 30:19
 Jeremiah 29:11-14
 (Confer *Grounded*, pp.59-70.)
- Those considering abortion because they consider the human life created to be defective should consider that the life is not so considered defective by God (Exodus 4:11; 1 Sam 16:7; John 19:1-3), Who, we recall, has created, objectively if not also subjectively redeemed, and potentially if not actually sanctified all and so Who equally values all. Those considering abortion because they consider the human life created to be unwanted should consider that the life is not so considered unwanted by God Who claims them as His own (Isaiah 43:1; Ezekiel 18:4a; Isaiah 49:16). People speak of women's right to choose, a Biblically tenuous idea (Proverbs 21:2; 14:12 [above]; Isaiah 30:1; Deuteronomy 30:19 [above]; Exodus 23:7), which ultimately denies the child any choice. Abortion-related sins against the Fifth Commandment begin with even thoughts diminishing the human life's worth and not wanting it to exist because it is considered to interfere with one's own wants and way (Matthew 5:21-22; Mark 7:21-23; 1 John 3:15).
- Once performed, abortions have impacts not only on the lives of the aborted children but also on their mothers, fathers (vilified for being poor dads but denied the right to protect their unborn children), siblings, medical profession, society as a whole (including its demographics), and even the Church (see *Life Studies*, pp.16-17). Each needs to deal with abortion's impacts appropriately (on men, see, for example, *Grounded*, pp.110-113; *LifeDate*, Fall 2019, p.7). In whatever grief one has, in Christ there is healing, hope and light (see *Grounded*, pp.106-109; *LifeDate*, Fall 2019, p.6). Those who do not confess their sin need to hear God's law that condemns it, while those who do confess their sin need to hear God's Gospel that forgives it (1 John 1:9; Isaiah 1:18).

Adoption:

- On previous Sundays, we have introduced our Life Issues class; explored the relationships between Holy Scripture and Life Issues; considered Life as created, redeemed, and sanctified; discussed Marriage and Parenthood (including efforts to promote/hinder conception and birth control); and taken a close look at abortion. Particularly relevant for our purposes today is what should be an openness at all times to receive as many children from God as He sends. Today we discuss adoption, what can be termed “an honorable, positive, and productive choice—a choice that can be a blessed and satisfying solution for both birth parents and adoptive parents, the adoptee, and society” (*Life Studies*, p.45).
- The institution of adoption in the United States is said to have begun around 1854 with the Rev. Charles Loring Brace’s formation of the Children’s Aid Society to relocate abandoned children from New York City slums by train to towns in the Midwest, some 100,000 children over a 75-year period. One woman so adopted at the end of her life still recalled watching children depart the train at each stop and wondering if and when she would ever be chosen and adopted. In 1992, the last time comprehensive totals are said to have been compiled, 127,000 children were adopted in the United States (presumably that year) through all types of adoption: international, foster care, private agency, independent, and step-parent. (*Life Studies*, pp.48, 54.) As a means of comparison, reportedly there are only 19 infant adoptions for every 1,000 abortions (*Grounded*, p.116).
- Holy Scripture tells how God “adopts” us, who are born of an alienating sinful nature.

Ephesians 1:3-6, 11

The Greek word for “adoption” (υιοθεσία [*huiiothesia*]) is from a presumed compound of the word for “son” (υιός [*huios*]) and a derivative of the verb for “set, put, or place” (τίθημι [*tithemi*]), namely *thesia*, meaning placing one to whom he does not naturally belong. For the Greek individual in Biblical times, adoption was used to continue the family and was highly honored, with the adoptee guaranteed sonship to the end of his life and considered a true heir of the father (and expected to care for the parents as a form of retirement). The concept if not the word “adoption” is used in the Old Testament for the relationship God established between Himself and the Israelites in preference to all other nations (Deuteronomy 7:7-11; Psalm 27:10; confer Romans 9:4-5) and is used in the Greek of the New Testament for the relationship God establishes between Himself and true disciples in Christ, though only fully realized in the life to come (Romans 8:23) (Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon #5206; *Life Studies*, p.45).

Galatians 4:4-7

Romans 8:14-17

Titus 3:4-7 (υιοθεσία is not used, but “becoming heirs” expresses the idea)

The Holy Spirit given through the pastor’s preaching of God’s Words and administering God’s Sacraments enables us to be God’s children on account of Christ’s work of redemption, and so also enables us to be co-heirs of Christ’s glory, though the path to that glory involves suffering (confer John 1:12-13).

- Some Biblical examples of “adoption” (or passages related to “adoption”) follow in canonical order and demonstrate God’s plan of servanthood for each life:
 - Joseph: Genesis 41:41; 48:5; 50:19-20
 - Moses: Exodus 2:1-10 (confer 1:22); Acts 7:20-22 (ἀναίρεω [*anairo*]); Hebrews 11:24-26
 - Samuel: 1 Samuel (1:11, 27; 2:27-35; 3:1-20; 7:15)
 - Solomon’s wise ruling: 1 Kings 3:16-28
 - Esther: Esther 2:5-8; 4:12-17
 - Jesus: Matthew 1:16, 18-25; John 10:10; Hebrews 4:14-16
 - Other little children: Mark 9:33-37
 - Mary and John: John 19:26-27

Birth parents, adoptive parents, and adoptees can be assured that God has a plan for them, even when humanly-speaking adoptions do not seem to go well.
- There are challenges (sometimes exacerbated by well-meaning but less-sensitive family and friends, not to mention pastors) and blessings for all of parties to adoptions. Birth parents may carry guilt and grief for life that can be relieved in Christ. Adoptive parents may have to deal with those who question their “legitimacy” as parents (not to mention issues related to closed or open adoptions with varying degrees of contact), but they also may have pain and grief of infertility eased. Adoptees may wonder about their “legitimacy” as children, but they also may know the love of four parents.
- What are some of the motives that move birth parents to place children up for adoption? What are some of the motives that move adoptive parents to adopt children? Are these motives always good? (Adoption’s “principal aim must not be to provide children for those who want them but are unable to conceive them”, much less “not just a child to care for but the best child, a certain kind of child” [Meilaender, *Bioethics*, 18].) How might God’s law and Gospel apply to both birth parents and adoptive parents? Instead of “choosing” abortion, birth parents might “choose” both to baptize their children and to place them with Christian families. God’s loving adoption of us into His family creates in us a deep concern for the needy of this world, including, along with widows and sojourners (and Levites), “lonely” children without fathers/parents (Exodus 22:22; Deuteronomy 26:12; Psalm 10:14; 68:5-6). We benefit from our examining assumptions that we may make about abortion and adoption: for example, that unwed mothers who do not abort may not have considered adoption as an option, and, given cases of abuse and neglect, that children are not necessarily better off with their birth parents.
- Oliver Twist, Annie, the 2009 horror movie *Orphan*, and the Pearsons adopting baby Randall on *This Is Us*—there are various popular media portrayals of orphans and adoption. In reality, there are older children (about one quarter of foster children have had ties to their birth families terminated, and all will eventually age-out of foster care and potentially be without family), international orphans (infants to teens are available), domestic infants (some 18,000 are said to be adopted in the United States each year), children with special needs (one website lists various conditions, defects, and disorders, including being a boy), and embryos (more than 60,000 wait in cryogenic labs for adoptive parents). People today may be more concerned about and willing to foster or adopt a pet than a child. Adopt if you can, encourage others to adopt, help fund an adoption, sponsor a child or orphanage through a reputable agency, and pray for birth and adoptive families and children. (Confer *LifeDate*, Fall 2019, pp.8-10.)
- As God in His love has adopted us, we in our love adopt others. Both kinds of adoption relate to life under a cross, next week’s life issue.

Life under the cross:

- Previously we have introduced our Life Issues class; explored the relationships between Holy Scripture and Life Issues; considered all life as created, redeemed, and sanctified and so equally valuable; surveyed Marriage and Parenthood (including efforts to promote conception, hinder conception, and control birth); taken a close look at abortion; and examined adoption. Particularly relevant for our purposes today is again that all life is equally valuable to God and so should every life be equally valuable to us, even when that life—whether our own life or another’s life—includes suffering. Today’s issue is life under the cross.
- Our Lord Jesus Christ not only Himself went to the cross for us and for our salvation, but He also calls us to take up our crosses and follow Him. Seemingly before even specifying His own crucifixion (Matthew 20:19), Jesus spoke of His disciples’ bearing their own crosses, apparently on at least two separate occasions. (Not to be confused is Simon of Cyrene’s carrying Jesus’s cross to the place of Jesus’s crucifixion [Matthew 27:32; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26].)

Matthew 10:37-38 (confer Luke 14:26-27)

Matthew 16:24-28 (confer Mark 8:34-9:1; Luke 9:23-27)

The Scriptural foundation for the teaching of the Christian’s life under the cross is not limited to those statements of our Lord’s that explicitly mention a cross, however. Based on those and other passages six statements about such life under the cross are made (see Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, III:68-76):

1. The “cross” is what Christians suffer as Christians, in living their Christian faith in this world. The wicked also have sorrows, but we would not strictly-speaking call those sorrows a “cross”, nor would Christians’ suffering on account of their sin appear to be a cross (the devil and the world hardly hate Christians because they stumble and fall occasionally).
 2. There is an inseparable connection between Christianity and the cross, such that those who refuse to bear their cross can no longer rightly claim to be Christians, yet Christians may not impose their own crosses.
 3. Christians’ flesh considers cross-bearing a heavy burden (that they are not receiving what they ought, that God has forgotten them), but Scripture reveals that the cross reveals God’s love to them as His children whom He disciplines. Suffering for one’s Christian confession can be the Holy Spirit’s testimony that one belongs to Christ, and suffering is a pledge of eternal glory to come.
 4. The cross is one of God’s tools to lead Christians through this world to eternal life, which is the purpose and profit of the cross. So, Christians should bear their cross patiently and also thereby both set a good example of patience for and encourage their fellow believers.
 5. The strength to bear the cross is derived from the forgiveness of sins and salvation received in faith through God’s Means of Grace.
 6. The sin that still cleaves to Christians forms a part of their cross.
- Under what is called “the theology of the cross” (*theologia crucis*, staurology), in contrast to “the theology of glory”, terms apparently coined by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther in connection with his April 25, 1518, *Heidelberg Disputation* (*Luther’s Works* American Edition 31:35-70), but based on Holy Scripture and reflecting earlier teaching, things are not as they seem to be: for example, Jesus’s

defeat is His victory, suffering is glory, death is life, and ordinary words, water, touch, bread and wine convey extraordinary blessings. God is hidden and works in weakness, and His people are characterized by the humility of confident faith in Christ. All of that has implications for how we live our lives, especially how we regard our own and other's lives.

- Different “abilities” or conditions, to some extent identifiable now already in the Petri-dish or womb, do not change the value of that nascent life, nor do any mental or physical sicknesses, illnesses, or diseases of varying degrees of severity over the course of an individual's life decrease the individual life's value (and therefore do not justify its “termination” at any stage of life). We might similarly say that one's health/fitness, education, profession, and societal position do not increase the value of the individual's life. In like manner, we speak not as society speaks of the “quality” of a human life as people might assess it but of a human life's “sanctity” as set apart by God (regardless of whether the individual at a given moment may be a believer or an unbeliever), from the moment of “conception” (understood as fertilization) to “natural” death (the death God brings about or permits, recognizing that death itself is “unnatural” in view of creation). And, we serve others and permit them to serve us, neither as bearing a heavy burden nor being a heavy burden. All service and suffering have an end (goal and termination) fixed by God, Who is good, omnipotent, and gives/permits suffering. We accept “whatever”, not with deflated discouragement but the joy of Jesus.
- This may be a good point to reiterate, as has been briefly mentioned in digressions previously, that, due to humankind's sin (both as a consequence of and as a remedy for that sin), God authorizes some killing as a punishment for or a consequence of killing. Such killings are not “exceptions” to or contradictions of God's valuing all human life but implications of that value (contrary to Pope Francis's analysis, though we may debate both what constitute capital crimes and capital punishment's administration). Long before the Fifth Commandment was given (for example, Exodus 20:13, with its debated translation of רָצַח [ratsach] as “kill” [KJV] or “murder” [ESV], including careless, negligent, and accidental human-slaughter), God authorized what we call “the death penalty” for death (for example, Genesis 9:6, related to human beings' creation in God's image, and Romans 13:1-4). And, God authorized wars for the protection of His people in the Old Testament, which originally St. Augustine's “just war” theory has carried into the present, both regarding going to war [just cause {defensive}, last resort, formal declaration, just intention {just peace}] and waging war [proportionality, discrimination, limited objectives]), avoiding errors of pacifism and crusade. Relevant are individuals' vocations and the distinction between the two kingdoms. Individuals' defense of themselves also has some Biblical foundation (for example, Exodus 22:2-3). Those who are spiritually forgiven may still be civilly executed, which, unlike excommunication does not reflect damnation.
- Much more could be said about our lives under the cross, our suffering, and God's causing/permitting it. Ultimately, we look to Jesus, Who for the joy set before Him endured His cross, and is now gloriously seated at the right hand of the Father (Hebrews 12:2). We look to Him not only as an example that we fail to imitate but also in faith as a Savior from our failures to value equally our own and others' lives as we live under our crosses, which, in one form or another, include the coronavirus that we next discuss under “Life Issues”.

Life issues and the coronavirus (COVID-19):

- Previously we have introduced our Life Issues class; explored the relationships between Holy Scripture and Life Issues; considered all life as created, redeemed, and sanctified and so equally valuable; surveyed Marriage and Parenthood (including efforts to promote conception, to hinder conception, and to control birth); taken a close look at abortion; examined adoption; and reflected on life under the cross. Today the coronavirus (COVID-19) provides a lens both to refocus on some of those beginning and middle of life issues and to glance somewhat ahead to the end of life issues, which will be our primary focus, likely for the following two sessions.
- To be sure, the coronavirus has raised quite a number of theological issues, probably enough to fill a 13-session quarter of Adult Bible Class on its own. The presentation of some virus-related theological issues that you can find on the coronavirus page on our website (www.pilgrimlc.org/coronavirus) endeavors to apply law and Gospel in view of the Ten Commandments (confer at least one other pastor’s approach), especially emphasizing our right relationship to the only true God and the priority of His Divine Service and His Means of Grace, and rightly subordinating such matters as obedience to governmental authorities when they go against those priorities and the potential false gods of preserving the public health and even our own individual earthly lives. As important as God’s gift of human life is, as this Class is endeavoring to make clear, preserving temporal human life should not come at the cost of losing eternal human life.
Matthew 10:28-33
- Recently rapper-and-apparent-presidential-candidate Kanye West made headlines for his statements about both his father’s wanting to abort him and his own initially wanting to abort his daughter. West also denounced Planned Parenthood and expressed skepticism of any potential coronavirus vaccine, mentioning paralysis and calling vaccinations “the mark of the beast” (for example, Revelation 13:17). West’s celebrity wife Kim Kardashian later tweeted about difficulty dealing with West’s bipolar disorder, to which tweet Kiss vocalist and guitarist Paul Stanley responded with a call for compassion. If you do not know who West, Kardashian, Stanley, or Kiss are, suffice it to say that there are various objections to potential coronavirus and other vaccines, some objections more Biblically-based than others (see *LifeDate*, Winter 2019, pp.4-5, and links there). As I wrote in my May 30, 2020, Minister’s Moment titled “Every human life is valuable”, we should be concerned about tissues from aborted babies’ being used in coronavirus vaccine development (and that is not even to mention other cell lines derived from adult tissue used without consent). In that column, I referred to Philosophy professor Christopher O. Tollefsen’s April 22, 2020, article “It’s Unethical to Use Fetal Tissue in COVID-19 Research”, published in *Public Discourse*, the journal of the Witherspoon Institute, which describes itself as an independent research center. (My column and a link to Tollefsen’s article are at <http://www.pilgrimlc.org/news/ministers-moment-may-30-2020>.) Tollefsen argues that predicating “the health of some on the deliberate destruction of the lives and health of others” is “incompatible with the fundamental commitments of medicine.” Tollefsen further argues that the matter is not one of science vs. religion, ethics vs. science, or ethics vs. medicine, and he concludes that “We must emerge from this death-filled crisis committed more firmly as a society to life, not least in the person of those youngest and most vulnerable members of our human family.” Any such use of fetal tissue is unethical, and, as Tollefsen outlines, there have been some safeguards in place against fetal tissue’s use, but the coronavirus situation is pressuring politicians to remove those safeguards. Any “good” that might come from such research does not

“justify” or “outweigh” the evil that is abortion. Good “ends” do not justify bad “means”. In some cases there are alternative vaccines whose development did not include cell lines originally from the tissue of aborted children. Other ethical questions regarding coronavirus vaccines include how it is to be ethically tested in people, whether or not people can be forced to receive it, and potentially prioritizing its distribution. (Note that in the case of stem-cell research Christians are opposed to the use of embryonic stem cells the acquisition of which requires the death of the child, but Christians are not necessarily opposed to research using those stem cells gathered from umbilical cords or what are called “adult”/non-embryonic stem cells, such as bone marrow stem cells.)

- Another life issue related to the coronavirus is the “unintended” consequences of other “hidden” deaths “caused” by lockdowns such as those lockdowns that we previously experienced and might experience again (admittedly there are also unintended and “hidden” benefits from such lockdowns, such as decreased pollution). Not only are there ramifications to the distinction between “essential” and “elective” procedures, but there are also increases in mental-health concerns and suicides. Anecdotally speaking, at one point one community had experienced more deaths from suicides seemingly “caused” by its coronavirus lockdown than it had experienced deaths from the virus itself. Statistically speaking, a scientific study in *The Lancet* concluded: “Substantial increases in the number of avoidable cancer deaths in England are to be expected as a result of diagnostic delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK. Urgent policy interventions are necessary, particularly the need to manage the backlog within routine diagnostic services to mitigate the expected impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on patients with cancer.” ([https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanonc/article/PIIS1470-2045\(20\)30388-0/fulltext.](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanonc/article/PIIS1470-2045(20)30388-0/fulltext.)) Are lives potentially saved from the coronavirus more valuable than those lost to such things as delayed-diagnosis cancer and suicide? Are the sheer numbers alone a legitimate basis on which to decide? (One U.S. estimate puts it at some 900,000 vs. some 300,000.)
- Yet another life issue related to the coronavirus is the arguably necessary allocating/rationing of health-care resources, which reportedly happened already in some places and may happen again in those same or other places. While triage (from the French verb *trier* meaning to separate, sort, shift, or select) of some sort has ancient roots, new problematic criteria may have entered into consideration. Originally three classifications (those likely to live regardless of care; those unlikely to live, regardless of care; and those for whom immediate care may make a difference), have become more sophisticated. A limitation of current practices was previously said to be not considering patients’ ages, but in the coronavirus, despite widespread agreement on prioritizing “those who have the best chance of surviving”, the problematic idea has emerged of not saving the most individual lives but of saving the most “life-years”, though in some cases life-years are only to be a consideration for comparing patients with similar likelihoods of surviving. As even an April 5, 2020, joint statement of ethicists recognizes, human lives are all of equal value; we can distinguish between allowing casualties and intentionally killing people (and so not “deciding who lives and who dies”); and “we will have the opportunity to decide once again what sort of society we intend to be. We should eschew all invidious [unfair, unjust] discrimination and recommit ourselves to treating all who are ill as bearers of profound, inherent, and *equal* worth and dignity.” ([https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2020/04/62001/.](https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2020/04/62001/))
- Sometimes we act more out of fleshy fear than from firm faith. Sometimes medical information is unavailable to us or decisions are made for us without our input or consent. With daily repentance Christians live in the forgiveness of sins received from God and extended to one another, forgiveness by grace for the sake of Jesus Christ that covers even our failures in connection with the coronavirus.

End-of-life issues:

- Previously we have introduced our Life Issues class; explored the relationships between Holy Scripture and Life Issues; considered all life as created, redeemed, and sanctified and so equally valuable; surveyed Marriage and Parenthood (including efforts to promote conception, to hinder conception, and to control birth); taken a close look at abortion; examined adoption; reflected on life under the cross; and seen how the coronavirus (COVID-19) engages beginning, middle, and end of life issues, the latter of which are our focus today and next time.
- As we have discussed, human life begins with the union of body and soul at the moment of conception (understood as fertilization, not implantation), and temporal human life continues until the soul departs the body (or Jesus returns, whichever comes first). We have discussed death's being "unnatural" in view of God's very-good creation, but the term "natural" death is nevertheless used to refer to the death that God permits/brings about without any person's action actively hastening it. Worth remembering is that all human beings have what may be said to be a terminal disease called sin, even if we all are not to the same extent irretrievably dying. All temporal human life has equal value as created, objectively redeemed, and at least potentially sanctified by God, yet arguably of greater value relative to temporal human life is the eternal human life to come, eventually with resurrected (if necessary) and glorified bodies. Ascertaining the precise moment that a soul departs its body arguably is difficult, all the more in our context with modern medicine's "advancements" (in Biblical times at least some thought the soul might remain in or linger near the body for several days after the body appeared to be dead). Some distinguish between the ceasing of heart and lung activity and what is called "brain death" ("whole brain", not just "higher" brain function but also brain-stem functions), because they think that only brain activity makes the body able to function as an integrated whole, though that claim is disputed (some integrative functions of the body apparently are not coordinated by the brain). Mechanical assistance to the circulatory and respiratory systems can keep some organs and tissues vital by themselves but raises questions whether the assistance is sustaining a living human being or oxygenating a corpse. (See Meilaender, *Bioethics*, pp.98-105.) Too often people consider the value of human life based on their assessment of its quality (such things as control of bodily functions, mobility, and memory), but such consideration misses human life's created, redeemed, and sanctified value. We might consider an animal's quality of life, but hopefully obvious to us are differences between animals and people (confer/compare *Life Studies*, pp.58-59). Those who share the nature that the Christ took into Himself and to both the cross and heaven, and who repent and believe in Him, are fully redeemed; death is their as His already-defeated enemy; and still Christians acutely feel the tension between the temporal life now and the eternal life to come.
 Philippians 1:20-24
 1 Peter 1:3-9
- Writing the day after Germany's Federal Constitutional Court this past February 2020 determined a supposed "Right to determine one's own death", the presiding clergyman of the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany (the SELK, by the first letters of the words of its German name, with whom the LCMS is in fellowship) is translated as noting the following: "We should speak with great respect and reserve about the plight of terminally ill people, their sufferings, and their yearning for death.

What many people often suffer for years on end goes beyond what healthy people can imagine. Under such conditions of suffering, thoughts of actively ending one's life might easily occur to anyone. And people who turn such thoughts into deeds deserve our Christian love of neighbour and our accompanying them to the end." Bishop Hans-Jörg Voigt also keenly warned that "The elimination of the hitherto untouchable taboo against suicide will have among its consequences the exertion of subtle pressure on severely ill people to acquiesce to the (perhaps even wrongly imagined) expectation of their family and friends by taking their own lives. What the Constitution defined in its first two articles as an ethical position for a Culture of Life has been stood on its head in the formulation of its negation for a Culture of Death." (*Lutheran Theological Review* 31 [2019]: pp.14, 16.)

- With its explanation to the Seventh Petition of the Lord's Prayer ("But deliver us from evil"), the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther's *Small Catechism* in translation has us believe, teach, and confess that we pray our Father in heaven to give us a "blessed end" (*seliges Ende; felicem vitae exitum*), and in the Great Litany we pray that the Good Lord would deliver us from "sudden and evil death". While the greatest distinction between a "blessed end" and an "evil death" might be that distinction between dying as a believer or unbeliever, we certainly could imagine that certain modes of death might be better or worse than others (perhaps one's dying at a ripe old age peacefully in one's sleep vs. a young person's being horrifically murdered). To be sure, in the century prior to Dr. Luther's writing and still current in his day there was a focus on "the art of dying" (*Ars moriendi*), the protocols and procedures of a good death and how to die well (writings contained such things as an explanation of the good side of dying and a consolation that dying is not something to fear; an outline of temptations to such things as a lack of faith, despair, impatience, and spiritual pride; and, for family and friends, general rules of behavior at a deathbed) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ars_moriendi). Yet the term "euthanasia" (not "Youth in Asia", as a church secretary put it when my youth group as a boy studied it), which comes from the Greek adverb for "well" and the noun for "death" and could be taken in a proper Christian sense of "dying well" with a "blessed end", apparently since it was first used in the early seventeenth-century by English Philosopher Francis Bacon meant "easy death" and now refers to the means of attaining such an easy death ("mercy killing", frequently assisted suicide, involving another person). Distinctions are made between active/positive and passive/negative, direct and indirect, voluntary and involuntary and compulsory, but such can be misleading and without a difference. For two millennia, doctors whose standard of ethics was the Hippocratic Oath were specifically prohibited from being a part of such an "easy death", as well as abortion, vowing in general to use treatment to help, not to injure. Reportedly Hippocrates was a minority voice against abortion, euthanasia, and others in the fifth-century B.C. as those who are against such things are today. When the U.S. Supreme Court in 1973 "legalized" abortion, medical schools rewrote, abbreviated, or did away with the Hippocratic Oath. The case of Dr. Jack Kevorkian, who claimed to have assisted at least 130 patients commit suicide between 1990 and 1998 with his "thanatron" and "mercitron", illustrates the shift from an absolute prohibition against administering a poison to a patient to seeing that same action as relieving suffering (Eyer, "Ethics and Suffering", www.lcms.org/lifeministry/library/suffering.)

End-of-life issues: (continued)

With regards to end-of-life issues we previously acknowledged some difficulty in ascertaining the point of temporal death and avoiding pitfalls related to assessing the quality of a human life in contrast to its created, redeemed, and sanctified value. We are sensitive to the plight of terminally ill people and their suffering and to the risk of social permission to take one's own life becoming pressure to do so. We discussed a "good death" or "dying well", primarily as dying in the faith, and modern relative unpreparedness for dying.

- Karen Ann Quinlan (1954-1985), Nancy Cruzan (1957-1990), and Terri Schiavo (1963-2005) were at the centers of relatively recent U.S. cases that developed legal rights to refuse some treatment, make decisions for loved ones, and decide which loved ones make those decisions. Other news and cases related to the so-called "right to die" are more-recent and come from all over the world.
 - In 1995, Holland reportedly had 3,600 cases of euthanasia or assisted suicide, nearly one-fourth of which were "without an explicit request of the patient". There were some 24,000 other cases of withdrawing "non-futile treatment" with the "explicit goal to hasten death". Many elderly Dutch are said to be afraid to enter a hospital for fear they will not leave it alive. (*Life Studies* p.59.)
 - In 2014, nearby Belgium became the first country in the world to allow doctors to kill terminally ill children of any age if the doctors and the children's parents consent (www.nbcnews.com printed 2014/02/13).
 - In October of 2019, decorated Paralympian Marieke Vervoort died at the age of 40 after undergoing assisted suicide. Vervoort was "disabled" and experienced some pain but was not "dying", though in Belgium being disabled reportedly qualified her for euthanasia, as does being transgender and having autism. (*LifeDate*, Winter 2019, p.20.)
 - In December of 2019, Western Australia legalized voluntary euthanasia effective mid-2021 for terminally ill patients expected to die in 6-12 months, and almost immediately there were calls also to allow those with mental illness or who are "tired of life" to die. (*LifeDate*, Spring 2020, p.20.)
 - On June 11, 46-year-old African-American Michael Hickson of Austin, who had quadriplegia and a serious brain injury, was, despite the objections of his wife, refused treatment, as well as tube-supplied food and water, while ill with COVID-19 (which treatment was not being rationed there at that time) because his doctors and "the state" did not believe he had a sufficient "quality of life" and that saving his life was "futile" (<https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2020/07/the-deadly-quality-of-life-ethic>).

Real people's lives are embroiled in these end-of-life issues. We do not want to get bogged down in individual cases, however, and so lose sight of the bigger issues. There is no "right to die" or right "to die with dignity", whatever that means (compare below). We recognize the difference between secular and spiritual arguments and decisions: a false prioritizing of autonomy (which is an illusion, given our overall dependence on God) and an avoiding/minimizing suffering that effectively eliminates sufferers. Christians consider the sanctity/equality of life and maximize its care, not thinking that suffering is good

in and of itself but rather that suffering is part of our life together under the cross, for which God provides all necessary grace and strength (1 Corinthians 12:26-27; 2 Corinthians 4:11-12, 17). We do not try to be like God (Genesis 3:4-5) or act like God, Who alone gives/takes (Job 1:21), kills/makes alive (Deuteronomy 32:39; Ecclesiastes 8:8), and holds our lives and our times in His hands (Job 14:5; Psalm 31:14-15; Ecclesiastes 3:2). We trust in Him, and we recognize that He is Lord and that our lives are lived in relationship to Him and to other people.

- Christians endeavor always to care (Luke 10:25-37; confer 2 Corinthians 1:3-7 and *Life Studies* pp.60-62) and never to kill (Exodus 20:13 KJV, *et cetera*). When the circumstances are such, we can and should allow the dying to die, but we should never intend for the death of the living. There is a distinction between one's intention/aim and the result of an action (for example, Christian martyrs aimed at being faithful despite the likely result of their death [Meilaender, *Bioethics*, p.69]). Continuing people's earthly lives is not the only or even the highest good (Psalm 16:9-11); earthly life is not a god but a gift. In faith and with hope, we can pray for release from this life according to God's will, but, in a lack of faith and without hope, we should not cause it. Three approaches to caring are recommended: (1) properly attempting to eliminate or alleviate the suffering; (2) attempting to help the sufferer explain and understand the suffering spiritually; and (3) simply being with the person in need (CTCR, *Christian Care*, pp.24, 36). Different circumstances and intentions can change the morality of treatments such as morphine, ventilators, and feeding tubes (see *Grounded*, pp.132-135). Even food and water, which we might normally consider to be essentials of care, can be contraindicated in some cases. We distinguish between acute and chronic conditions, and we distinguish between ordinary and extraordinary/heroic measures (CTCR, *Euthanasia*, p.15; *Christian Care*, pp.51-52). Treatment may be refused or stopped when it is useless/futile (relative to the patient's condition, asking will the treatment benefit the life this patient has) or excessively burdensome (to the patient, not to others, not rejecting life but treatment, choosing less-burdened, even if shorter, life). Providing the dying with loving care—including food and water, if possible, and spiritual support—keeping them as comfortable and pain-free as possible, might be said truly to be “death with dignity” (*Life Studies*, pp.59-60, 61).
- As much as possible, patients should be told the truth and involved in decisions about their own care. Care should be driven neither by medical paternalism nor absolute patient self-determination. Providers and patients need to agree on care or part ways, and, in some cases, providers are obligated to refer patients to other providers who will carry out actions that may be against the current provider's own beliefs. Some patients are unable to participate in decisions about their care (infants and young children, differently-abled, unconscious, severely demented), and instead are subjected to a “substituted judgment” standard of what the patient would have wanted if he or she had been able to tell, or what a reasonable person would want, or what is deemed to be in the patient's best interests (what would benefit the life that the patient has, not judge its worth by secular standards but recognize its created/redeemed/sanctified value). (Meilaender, *Bioethics*, pp.75-78.)

- The patients' own desires may be better expressed and realized through either advanced medical directives (or a living will) or a medical (or health-care) power of attorney (in contrast to a will that distributes property and assets and a durable power of attorney for financial, legal and tax decisions). Yet, advance directives attempt to extend our autonomy to a time when we are no longer autonomous, giving privileged status to one moment of independence in the course of a life that begins in dependence and, often, ends in dependence. Living wills are usually thought to refuse treatment but could desire treatment, yet they may not work as well as they are thought to work, and they distance patients from caregivers, brothers and sisters in Christ who carry one another's burdens and so fulfill His law (Galatians 6:2). More preferable is said to be the health-care power of attorney, which affirms our dependence on one another (if no close-relatives remain as possible proxies, members of the Body of Christ may so serve). (Meiladnder, *Bioethics*, pp.79-88.)
- While there seems to be a need for the donation of such things as corneas, hearts, lungs, kidneys, and livers, reportedly 40% of potential donors become actual donors, in most cases because families refuse to permit the donation. We may legitimately question social pressure encouraging organ donation and transplantation, and weigh the "deep-seated hunger to live longer and our fear of death against equally deep-seated notions of the sacredness of human life in the body", recognizing threats "to dehumanize the dying process in ways that belie the glowing talk about the 'gift of life.'" Generally, viewing people as stewards rather than owners of their own bodies, Jewish and Roman Catholic traditions previously forbade self-mutilation but now approve self-giving of organs and tissues for transplantation, if doing so does not cause grave harm to donor's bodily life. Pressure may keep consent from being free, but more important is the underlying issue of the integrity of bodily life. Family reluctance arguably should override a deceased person's previously-stated willingness to donate. Related are concerns about the determination of "death" and the practice of sustaining circulation and respiration for the purposes of harvesting organs. (Meilaender, *Bioethics*, pp.89-105.)
- The not "final" but "temporary" (in view of eternity) disposition of one's mortal remains and the spiritual rites and rituals that accompany that disposition are important at least in part because they witness to the value of a believer's life not only as created, redeemed, and sanctified in this world but also as a soul in the intermediate state and as remains to be resurrected and glorified in the world to come. (For years Pilgrim has made available in the Narthex sheets for pre-planning such arrangements, but sadly few completed forms are on file.)
- In last summer's "Last Things" study, we noted that there are neither new marriages nor procreation in heaven (Matthew 22:20; Mark 12:25; Luke 20:34-36), but there is less consensus on whether the human state of being married continues for eternal life (Mitchell and Grobien, for example, argue marriage's earthly purpose of embodying the profound mystery of the union of Christ and His Church [Ephesians 5:31] is finished and so the married state is obsolete [see *Taboo*, pp.45-47, 212-215]). Regardless, the fullness of eternal life and the

enjoyment of its bliss do not depend on any continuation of the married state, presence of one's spouse or children, sexual relations, *et cetera*, but the fullness of eternal life and the enjoyment of its bliss depend on the communication of and our participation in the Divine love and life that we have together as the Church, united with Her Bridegroom, Christ (Revelation 19:6-9; confer 21:9; 22:1-7).

- To be sure, there are some aspects of end-of-life issues, as of other life issues, on which people of good consciences, properly formed by Holy Scripture, may disagree. End-of-life issues relate primarily to the Fifth Commandment, whether hurting or harming our neighbors in their or ourselves in our own bodies, or failing to help and support our neighbors or ourselves in every physical need. We condemn all sin against the Fifth Commandment, including all forms of suicide (without necessarily judging whether the person who commits suicide goes to heaven or hell [confer Meilaender, *Bioethics*, p.60]), as we condemn all sin against the other nine Commandments, and we extend to repentant sinners, including ourselves, the forgiveness of sins against the Fifth Commandment, including where we err in honoring God's gift of life, and the forgiveness of sins against the other nine Commandments. Suffering and death "do not speak the last word about the human condition" but God does (May, cited by Meilaender, *Bioethics*, p.66). As we live in this lifetime as those who are justified but still sinful, we trust not our own feelings but His Word and Spirit ultimately to maintain our sure and certain hope in eternal life (John 3:16), the resurrection of the body (John 5:29), the blessed reunion in heaven (1 Thessalonians 4:17), and the wiping away of tears from all faces (Isaiah 25:8; Revelation 7:17; 21:4). And, we faithfully confess the same, the final "life issue" we will discuss.

Faithfully confessing life:

- Previously we have introduced our Life Issues class; explored the relationships between Holy Scripture and Life Issues; considered all life as created, redeemed, and sanctified and so equally valuable; surveyed Marriage and Parenthood (including efforts to promote conception, to hinder conception, and to control birth); taken a close look at abortion; examined adoption; reflected on life under the cross; seen how the coronavirus (COVID-19) engages beginning, middle, and end-of-life issues; and more-directly discussed end-of-life issues. With all of that ground covered, how we, in our various vocations, faithfully confess God’s truth regarding temporal and eternal human life is today’s final topic, as we also conclude our Life Issues Sunday Adult Bible Class.

- Perhaps one of the best Biblical examples of people, in one of their vocations, faithfully confessing God’s truth regarding temporal and eternal human life is that of the Hebrew midwives, who disobeyed the king of Egypt’s command to kill Hebrew newborn boys.

Exodus 1:15-22

God’s Word records this account for us and in the process demonstrating His care for them, their proper fear for Him (greater than their improper fear for Pharaoh), and how their faithfulness to God arguably played a role in allowing Moses to be born and accomplish the Exodus of God’s people from slavery in Egypt (see *Grounded*, pp.64-65). Yet, their experience, while unique, should not be the only one of its kind. Each of us is called, both individually and collectively, to look after the interests of others.

Philippians 2:3-4

All others are certainly in view, yet those of our neighbors who are least able to defend themselves and who do not have the usual immediate defenders should be our objects of special concern, as they are God’s objects of special concern.

James 1:27

(The fatherless and widows are paired some 30 times in the Old Testament, sometimes in pronouncements of judgment, and often with concern for the sojourner.)

- Jesus is the Light of the World (John 1:9; 3:19; 8:12; 9:5; 12:46), and yet Jesus also says that we are the light of the world (Matthew 5:14; the “you” is plural). We do not take part in works of darkness but expose them (Ephesians 5:8-14). (See further “Pro-Life Lights” in *Grounded*, pp.147-151.) We not only speak, but we also act.

James 2:15-16

In love we speak honest words of law and Gospel, and we show that care in our deeds. Conversations about life and other spiritual matters involve people’s most-closely held beliefs and so can be intensely personal, emotional, and adversarial. Yet, we do not avoid the tension, but we endeavor to listen and respond as best as we can, knowing that God speaks through us (Luke 21:15) and His Word accomplishes what He intends (Isaiah 55:10-11). (See further “Real. Present. God. In Life Issues: In Controversy!”, pp.8-10.)

- There are all sorts of things that can start “life conversations” with immediate or extended family members, friends, classmates or coworkers. Books, TV shows, and movies do not have to be explicitly “pro-life” in order for us to have “pro-life” conversations about them, how God and we love and so care for the unborn, differently-abled, and near-death. Even characters’ sinful choices present opportunities to discuss sin and its consequences relative to life, including God’s forgiving our sin for the sake of Jesus Christ and enabling us to have eternal life with Him. (See “Starting Life Conversations”, *LifeDate*, Spring 2020, p.14.)
- Congregations do not have to be of a certain size in order to have a formal or informal “life ministry”: “walking together, bearing one another’s burdens, and celebrating the lives God has

given us.” We can celebrate with newlyweds, help a parent in a pew struggling with a preschooler, encourage a believing parent whose unbelieving spouse has abandoned the family, visit the sick and elderly, prepare meals for the grieving, *et cetera*. (See “Celebrating Life in a Small Congregation”, *LifeDate*, Spring 2020, pp.26-27.)

- Organizations such as the LCMS, Lutherans for Life, and Right to Life of East Texas can help us faithfully confess life. The LCMS usually has representatives in the Washington, D.C., March for Life and has hosted Life Conferences (for more, see <https://www.lcms.org/how-we-serve/mercy/life-ministry>). A Recognized Service Organization of the LCMS, Lutherans for Life’s vision is “Every Lutheran, both individually and in community, upholding the God-given value of human life and influencing society to do the same.” Lutherans for Life “believes that the Church is compelled by God’s Word to speak and act on behalf of those who are vulnerable and defenseless” and so strives “to give a Gospel-motivated witness to the Church and society” calling “God’s people to compassionate action and foster life-affirming alternatives for those facing difficult situations.” As “five core values”, Lutherans for Life acknowledges the following: that (1) God’s Word informs and God’s Spirit empowers our work and witness; (2) Faithfulness to biblical truth and integrity of witness are more valuable than political expediency; (3) The mind of Christ determines our response to life issues—prayerfully with humility, compassion, and selflessness, speaking the truth in love; (4) Education remains our focus, trusting the Holy Spirit to change hearts and minds; and (5) We uphold the sanctity of human life because all people are created and redeemed by God Who intends they bear His image for time and eternity. (*LifeDate*, Winter 2019, pp.6-7; for more see <https://lutheransforlife.org/>). Right to Life of East Texas usually offers scholarships, has an annual Banquet, booth at the Gregg County Fair, and a Life Chain event (for more, see <http://righttolifeofeasttexas.org/>).
- Ultimately God is the defender of life, but He works through human means, both caring for us through our neighbors and presenting Himself as in-need in our neighbors, from the beginnings of our temporal lives through to their ends. We can and should learn (Proverbs 4:1-9; Hosea 4:6a), speak (Acts 4:18-20; Romans 15:14; Colossians 3:16; 2 Timothy 1:13-14; 1 Peter 4:11), and act (Proverbs 24:11-12; Matthew 25:31-46), including praying (Ephesians 6:18; 1 Timothy 2:1-4) and bearing one another’s burdens (Galatians 6:2), such as the younger’s helping those who are older (Titus 2:2-6). Yet, in the end, with daily repentance and faith, we live in His forgiveness of sins for our failures to faithfully confess life, as for all of our other sins (Isaiah 1:18; 1 John 1:8-10). (Confer *Life Studies*, pp.9, 11, and 17.)

Conclusion:

- Hopefully in the thirteen sessions of our Life Issues Sunday Adult Bible Class we have done more than barely touch the tip of the iceberg of Life Issues (see p.1; for potential reviews, see *Life Studies*, pp.4-7, 10). Although, we have barely touched some issues, such as genetic engineering, stem-cell and other research, and still other topics. At various times we have considered both what Holy Scripture says about life issues and what life issues lead us to learn from Holy Scripture. And we have endeavored to take God’s Word as revealed absolute truth, resisting the temptation by the devil, the world with its culture of death, and our own sinful nature to question what God really said.
- God being willing, this Sunday Adult Bible Class will not be the end of our, either individual or collective, study of life issues. We all can benefit from continued prayer and meditation and affliction in regards to life issues. To that end, we commend the book *Grounded in God’s Word*, free copies of which are available.

Readings and Hymns for Openings, Other Notes, Prayers for Closings

Session 1: (Introduction and Scripture & Life)

Opening Reading: 2 Timothy 3:12-17

Opening Hymn: “O Word of God Incarnate” (*TLH* 294, *LW* 335, *LSB* 523)

All MUNICH; *LW* and *LSB* st.2 combination of *TLH*'s sts.2 and 3.

Closing Collect:

O Word of God incarnate, Truth unchanged, unchanging,
You show us our sin, Your salvation, and how we, Your redeemed children,
should live;
by Your Holy Scripture train us in righteousness, that we may be complete and
equipped for every good work;
for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and
forever. (Amen.)

Session 2: (Life created, redeemed, and sanctified)

Opening Reading: Genesis 1:26-31

Opening Hymn: “On My Heart Imprint Your Image” (*TLH* 179, *LW* 100, *LSB* 422)

All DER AM KREUZ; center and only stanza of a 29-stanza Passion hymn to find continued use.

Closing Collect:

O Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
You created humankind in Your image, You redeemed us by the cross, and You
sanctify us through Your means of grace, renewing Your image in us;
ever lead us to honor and defend Your gift of human life and its sexuality,
that lives may be saved and Your Triune Name glorified,
for You live and reign one God, now and forever. (Amen.)

Session 3: (Marriage & Parenthood [1])

Opening Reading: Ephesians 5:22-33

Opening Hymn: “Our Father, by Whose Name” (not in *TLH*, *LW* 465, *LSB* 863)

RHOSYMEDRE; “a prayer to the Holy Trinity for the family” with apparent reference to Eph 3:14.

Closing Collect:

Heavenly Father,
from You every family in heaven and on earth is named;
ever lead us all to live sexually pure and decent lives and lead husbands and wives
to love and honor each other and to be open at all times to parenthood of any
number of children as You see fit,
that Your Name may be glorified and Your Church increased.
Through Jesus Christ, Your Son, Our Lord, Who lives and reigns with You and
the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (Amen.)

Session 4: (Marriage & Parenthood [2])

Opening Reading: 1 Samuel 1:1-20

Opening Hymn: “Lord Jesus Christ, the Children’s Friend” (not in *TLH*, *LW* 470, *LSB* 866)
LW TALLIS’ CANON; *LSB* WAREHAM.

Closing Collect:

O Lord of Hosts,
You alone truly open and close wombs, giving Your servants children as You see fit;
So lead us to be receptive at all times to Your gift of any number of children and also to be content in our circumstances if the children for whom we hope and pray are not given,
that we and they may live to Your glory all the days of our lives;
through Jesus Christ, Your Son, Our Lord, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (Amen.)

Session 5: (Abortion [1])

Opening Reading: Psalm 139:13-16

Opening Hymn: “Shepherd of Tender Youth” (*TLH* 628, *LW* 471, *LSB* 864)
TLH OLIVET; *LW* and *LSB* ITALIAN HYMN.

Closing Collect:

O Lord,
wonderful are Your works; our souls know it very well;
by Your Spirit working through Your Word, ever teach us that You create us and all people in the womb and value all such life that You there create,
that we might live out the days formed for us loving You and our neighbors, especially by protecting those least able to defend themselves from threats such as abortion,
through Jesus Christ, Your Son, Our Lord, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (Amen.)

Session 6: (Abortion [2])

Opening Reading: Ezekiel 20:27-32

Through Ezekiel, the Lord called His people then—and calls His people today—to repent of their unfaithfulness in the face of His repeated mercy and grace, specifically of their repeated sins of idolatry, including killing their children in the ways of the unbelievers that surrounded them. To those who do repent, He promises His restoration.

Opening Hymn: “Let Children Hear the Mighty Deeds” (*TLH* 629, *LW* 472, *LSB* 867)
NUN DANKET ALL; a paraphrase of Psalm 78:1-11, passing the faith from generation to generation.

Closing Collect:

O Lord God,
You show us Your mercy and grace and call us to worship only You and to walk in Your ways;
forgive us of our idolatry and resulting unfaithfulness to You, sacrificing the children that You give on the altar of our own selfishness,
that we might better worship You, honor Your gift of life, and proclaim Your glory to generations yet unborn,
through Jesus Christ, Your Son, Our Lord, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (Amen.)

Session 7: (Adoption)

Opening Reading: Ephesians 1:3-6

Opening Hymn: “Gracious Savior, Gentle Shepherd” (*TLH* 627, *LW* 475, not in *LSB*)
SIEH, HIER BIN ICH; John Whittemore (1850) drew from three hymns by Jane E. Leeson (1842).

Closing Collect:

God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
You have blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing, choosing us in Him
and predestining us for adoption to You;
forgive us who are so adopted of our failure to care for the neediest children
among us, and move us to better care of them,
that working through us You might set all the solitary in homes,
through Jesus Christ, Your Son, Our Lord, Who lives and reigns with You and the
Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (Amen.)

Some notes on the Biblical examples of “adoption” (see *Life Studies*, pp.46-47, 48-49, 56):

Joseph: Genesis 41:41; 48:5; 50:19-20

The type of leadership that Pharaoh gave to Joseph was normally given to/inherited by a son (such “adoption” also the practice of later Roman Caesars). Joseph was able to save his family from famine and later spoke of God’s good purposes in what otherwise appeared to be evil.

Moses: Exodus 2:1-10 (confer 1:22); Acts 7:20-22 (ἀναίρέω [anaireo]); Hebrews 11:24-26

In some sense complying with Pharaoh’s order, Moses’s mother arranged for his adoption by Pharaoh’s daughter. God planned for the future of an entire nation through that adoption, though Moses later “rejected” it, and the Divinely-inspired author of Hebrews notes the lack of religious upbringing Moses received.

Samuel: 1 Samuel (1:11, 27; 2:27-35; 3:1-20; 7:15

Committed to the Lord from before his conception, Samuel served God and people, in some sense adopted into Eli’s family as his unfaithful sons were cut off from the Lord’s service that they abused.

Solomon’s wise ruling: 1 Kings 3:16-28

The passage is said to illustrate a birth mother’s struggle to “give up” her baby, that some women will do *anything* to become a mother, and the birth mother’s love for her child. We also note the love of the birth mother for her child and the God-given wisdom Solomon had that can also guide people today relative to adoption.

Esther: Esther 2:5-8; 4:12-17

Adopted by her cousin Mordecai, Esther, with her courage and boldness tempered by a humble and obedient spirit, was used by God to save His people from an evil plot that would have destroyed the Jewish people.

Jesus: Matthew 1:16, 18-25; John 10:10; Hebrews 4:14-16

Arguably the “pinnacle of all Scriptural adoption” is the placing of Jesus with His adoptive father/guardian Joseph, who is said to have risked the shame of Mary’s “out-of-wedlock” pregnancy. This adoption plan fulfilled birth and other prophecies about Jesus and provided the One Who gives life abundantly and sympathizes with us in our weakness.

Other little children: Mark 9:33-37

Jesus illustrates His principle of being first by being last and servant of all with the idea of receiving/welcoming a little child in His Name. Jesus Himself partook of their and our flesh and blood and sacrificed Himself on the cross for their and our adoption. Birth parents may receive/welcome a little child into a womb and then after it is born place the child up for adoption to serve them (in some ways more difficult than abortion and single-parenting but

not abandonment), and adoptive parents may serve such a child by receiving/welcoming him or her in Jesus's Name into their home. (See *Grounded*, pp.114-117.)

Mary and John: John 19:26-27

Also pointing us to Christ's entrusting His Church to the care of Her ministers, Jesus's entrusting Mary to the care of the apostle John, likely a nephew or other relative of some sort, shows His concern for her wellbeing after His death, resurrection, and ascension. (There are also implications for interpreting the relationships of the other "kinsmen" of the Lord, likely children of Joseph's from a previous marriage or "cousins" or other relatives of some sort).

Session 8: (Life under the cross)

Opening Reading: Matthew 10:37-39

Opening Hymn: "My Soul, Now Praise Your Maker" (*TLH* 34, *LW* 453, *LSB* 820)

NUN LOB, MEIN SEEL; "without question one of our most majestic and fervent hymns of praise".

Closing Collect:

Lord Jesus Christ,

You endured Your cross for the joy set before You;

forgive us for Your sake of our failures to bear our crosses and equally value our own and all other human life,

that, looking to You as we suffer now, we may also enter eternal glory,

where You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (Amen.)

Session 9: (Life issues and the coronavirus [COVID-19])

Opening Reading: Matthew 10:28-33 (verses before last week's Reading)

Opening Hymn: "O Son of God, in Galilee" (not in *TLH*, *LW* 400, *LSB* 841)

TWENTY-FOURTH; "concern for the physically afflicted" but lessened and disjointed by stanza omissions.

Closing Collect:

Lord Jesus Christ,

in love You considered us of so great a value that You gave Your life on the cross for us;

forgive us of our fear those who kill the body but not the soul, and lead us to fear Him Who destroy both soul and body in hell,

that, confessing You before people, we also may be confessed by You before your Father Who is in heaven,

where You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (Amen.)

Session 10: (End-of-life issues)

Opening Reading: Philippians 1:20-24

Opening Hymn: "I Will Sing My Maker's Praises" (*TLH* 25, *LW* 439, not in *LSB*)

SOLLT ICH MEINEM GOTT; may need to speak; *TLH* has 6 of PG's 12, but 4 & 5 omitted by *LW*.
(Could sing to LASSET UNS MIT JESU ZIEHEN, for example, *TLH* 409.)

Closing Collect:

Lord Jesus Christ,

for us to live is You, and to die is gain, and so we are hard-pressed between the two;

help us to leave to You when we die in this world and come to You in the next, and help us by Your grace and strength to bear the suffering You permit for our good,

that we may honor and equally value the life You give to every person and love and serve them as You have loved and served us,

for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (Amen.)

Session 11: (End-of-life issues [2])

Opening Reading: Luke 10:25-37

Opening Hymn: "Jesus, I Live to Thee" (*TLH* 591, not in *LW* or *LSB*)

TENBURY; speak or sing to a more-familiar S.M. tune, such as SOUTHWELL (for example, *LSB* 99).

Closing Collect:

Lord Jesus Christ, our Good Samaritan,

You perfectly love the Lord Your God and Your neighbors as Yourself;

have compassion on us and bind up our wounds, especially forgiving our sins, cleansing us with the water of Holy Baptism and sustaining us with Your Body and Blood in the Sacrament of the Altar,

that, also loving the Lord our God and our neighbors, we may compassionately care for them and ourselves,

for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (Amen.)

Session 12: (End-of-life issues [3])

Opening Reading: Revelation 21:1-8

Opening Hymn: "Almighty Lord, before Thy Throne" (*TLH* 579, not in *LW* or *LSB*)

BUFORD; speak or sing to a more-familiar C.M. tune, such as NEW BRITAIN (for example, *LSB* 744).

Closing Collect:

Lord God, You are the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,

You graciously deign to live with people whom You make to be Your own;

ever lead us to repent of our sins against the Fifth Commandment and all of the Commandments and to trust You freely to forgive our sin,

that, at the last, we may enter Your Holy City, the New Jerusalem, where there is no more pain, death, or mourning, and have You wipe every tear from our eyes,

for You—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—live and reign one God, now and forever. (Amen.)

Session 13: (Faithfully Confessing)

Opening Reading: Exodus 1:15-22

Opening Hymn: “God Brought Me to This Time and Place” (*LW* 456, not in *TLH* or *LSB*)

ALLEIN GOTT IN DER HÖH; “Clearly in evidence as its basis are”: 1Sa 7:12; Ps 126:3; Rev 5:13b.

Closing Collect:

Lord God,

You would have us fear, love, and trust in You above all things, and You blessed the Hebrew midwives who so feared You and let the newborn boys of Your people live;

ever lead us to repent of our sins in regards to life, to trust You freely to forgive our sin, and to at least want to do better faithfully confessing life in word and deed,

that You may also bless us with families, brothers and sisters in Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord;

through the same Jesus Christ, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (Amen.)

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