

"Whose Choice?"  
1 Corinthians 6:12-20

January 18, 2015

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday After the Epiphany – Life Sunday

At this time of year, our congregation, along with many congregations of various Christian denominations, commemorates “Life Sunday”. There are so many issues connected with this commemoration that one hardly knows where to begin. Should we start by talking about the evils of abortion, euthanasia, and so on? Should we focus on discussing when life begins? Is it helpful to think about the laws of our land and how they should be changed?

I think it really all begins, not with these various issues, but with the question of who is in charge. If this question is answered incorrectly, then life will often turn into death. However, if this question is answered correctly according to the Word of God, then life will not only survive, but thrive.

The controversy over life issues in our country today occurs because autonomy is assumed. “Autonomy” is from two Greek words that mean “self rule.” We want to be in charge of ourselves, our choices, and our decisions. People demand the right to be autonomous and want to be free to make choices based solely on their own desires without any outside interference. Recent court decisions have made autonomy to be the norm more and more these days.

But this is not a new problem nor is it only associated with life issues. The desire for autonomy to “self rule” - goes back a long way – all the way back to the Garden of Eden. It is really the basis of all sin. Adam and Eve wanted to be in charge of themselves rather than being obedient to God’s law. They rejected God’s rule because they wanted to be like God and rule themselves.

The insistence on autonomy has been the source of sin ever since. Whenever we break any of God’s commands, it is because we wish to follow our own standards. Whenever we fail to obey God’s commands, it’s because we want to be our own god as Adam and Eve did and set our own standards for behavior.

We see that occurring in our text for today. The people in Corinth believed that satisfying one's sexual appetites was as natural as satisfying one's appetite for foods. Therefore, there was nothing wrong with prostitution, even same sex prostitution. Despite God's 6<sup>th</sup> Commandment forbidding sexual behavior outside of marriage, the people felt free to do whatever they wanted to do because they wanted to do it. After all, it's my body, they would say, therefore it's my choice as to what I can do.

The same kind of thinking goes on today within our own church. You have all been catechized well. You know God's commandments. You know what God has to say about loyalty to Him, hearing the Word of God with other Christians, the use of material goods, sexual behavior, the taking of human life, the right use of our speech and so on. I doubt that very many of us are simply ignorant when we sin. Instead, we live autonomously. We want to do what we want to do. We want to follow our own standards, even when such standards conflict with the Word of God, because we want to be free to make our own choices and do our own thing. We want to be the God of our lives and have the right to be so. We constantly break the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment because we constantly have a god besides the true God – namely, ourselves.

The practice of autonomy is quite clear when we discuss life issues. Abortion should be legal for a woman to obtain, not because the life of the child is in doubt or what any law says, but because it is her body and her choice (of course, the fact that another body – the baby's – is involved is ignored.) Suicide, - even physician assisted suicide - should be legal, people say, because "It is my life and my right to choose to end it." The practice of autonomy is being twisted and abused to go far beyond just self-rule, but rule of those for whom I have legal responsibility. People want to have the right to end the lives of those who are elderly, terminally ill, handicapped, and so on because of how their situations affect me. They are my responsibility so I have the right to choose what to do.

To the idea of autonomy and my right to do what I want with my body, Paul says, "You are not your own." The expression of autonomy which says, "It's my body; therefore, it's my right to choose

what I want to do” is false right from the start. It is NOT your body; therefore, you do NOT have the right to choose your own course of action. This is true regarding prostitution in our text. This is true regarding every sinful action we take. This is true regarding life issues.

God has created every body and given every life to non-believers as well as Christians. God owns every body and every life. God who creates every life is the only One who has the right to end any life. You and I are not in charge of our bodies and our lives, much less the bodies and lives of others. You and I have no right to end lives. Because of our sin, we only have the right to receive death from God at His time as the punishment for our sin.

“You are not your own” is God’s Law which must be preached to our society, within the church and to each of us. The world will openly reject it and be quite hostile about it because of the overwhelming desire for autonomy. Some within the Christian Church will quietly reject it and be quite subtle about it, also because of their desire for autonomy. Each of us needs to hear this, first because we can easily be swayed by the world’s thinking and the thinking of other denominations and, secondly, whether or not abortion, euthanasia, or any other life issue will ever affect us does not matter because the desire to be autonomous is the source of every sin.

But if this all we do – proclaim the Law – we run the risk of appearing to be (or actually being) self-righteous finger-waggers. There are many people hurting out there (and, perhaps, in here) because this Law condemns us and our actions. There are people hurting out there (and, perhaps, in here) because of wrong choices they have made in the name of autonomy. Although the Word of God brings a message of Law and condemnation, that’s not all that it brings. Where is the hope and comfort for those for choices made with relation to life issues, either by themselves or by others?

A Christian song writer and performer who is a friend of mine, named Don Wharton, wrote a song called “Two Times You’re Mine” in which he told the story of a young boy who lovingly built a toy boat and sailed it in the local river. However, the current took the boat and it drifted away. The boy was broken hearted without his beloved boat. One day, he saw the boat for sale in the window of a

second hand shop. The boy took all of the allowance money he had and bought the boat he had made. As he carried the boat out of the store, he rejoiced and said, "You're mine. Two times you're mine: once because I made you and once because I bought you."

The song goes on to say that this is what God has done for us. St. Paul says to the people in Corinth, "For you were bought with a price." God owns us and all people because He made us. The current of sin caused us to drift away from God and we were lost. But God loved us so much that He wanted us back in relationship with Him. He was willing to pay any price to have you, me, and every person who lives back again, forgiven of sin and right with Him.

That's why Jesus came to this world. He came to redeem us. "Redeem" is a word that means to buy back again. The price to obtain us was high. Unlike the song, Jesus could not just gather His allowance money and buy us back, let alone all people who have ever lived. That was not enough. All the money in the world was not enough for God to possess you in love. The price Jesus paid was Himself. He offered His body on the cross as the perfect sacrifice for sin. He shed His own blood to purchase our forgiveness. His death gives life to all and His resurrection from the dead insures our resurrection and place with God forever in heaven. As St. Peter puts it in his first epistle, "You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot." (1 Peter 1:18-29)

We are not autonomous. We belong to God. And that changes our entire way of thinking and entire way of living for the better. To those who traffic in death under the premise that some life has less value or no value, we must proclaim that God loves and values ALL life. Jesus died to redeem all life – preborn life, aged life, life that is dying, life that is handicapped, and so on. In baptism, every person becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit, the dwelling place of the living God.

Since this is true, St. Paul says, we are to glorify God with our bodies and our lives. We glorify God by being proponents of life and not death. We glorify God by being caregivers for life, and not just proponents of life. We are to see humanity, especially those in difficult life situations, as God sees them. If God so loves and paid such a high price to possess such life, what is His attitude and our attitude toward life? It is love and care. The two cannot be separated. With the attitude of love comes the action of care.

God calls us to care for those whom He loves. This includes not only the born, the young, the healthy, and fully functional. It also includes the preborn, the aged, the terminally ill, and disabled. Such people find their value, not in their abilities, their contributions to society, or their convenience to

us, but in God's unconditional love, the redemption of Christ Jesus, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

We are also to look with love and support on those involved in caring for the lives of people in difficult situations. It involves those connected to such life: those carrying a difficult pregnancy, those caring for aged, terminally ill, or disabled family and friends. These people may make mistakes, arrive at wrong choices, or choose the wrong course of action. Such people find their peace of mind, not in their ability to always make the right decisions and do the right things, but in God's unconditional love, the redemption of Christ Jesus, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

About thirty years ago, a movie was released entitled, "Who's Life Is It Anyway?" which attempted to deal with life issues, specifically about the right of a man to die who was paralyzed from the neck down in a car accident. I've never seen the movie, but have always been fascinated with the title. Our natural self and this movie say that life belongs to the one who has it. The Word of God says life belongs to the One who gives it, namely God. In our possession, life only leads to suffering and death. In God's possession, life has meaning and purpose; life has the care and support of God; and life has the promise of everlasting life. So let life be God's. Trust Him to maintain and care for that life in the way that is best according to His loving will. And, in the long run, all will be well. Amen.