

The Gift of Life in the Gospel of John

Christians value human life differently than the secular world and Marianne Meye Thompson put a spotlight on the reason for the difference in her Bible Study, August 19th at the National Gathering of the Fellowship Community in San Diego, CA.

Thompson, Professor of New Testament at Fuller Seminary, pointed to the theme of life and the meaning of life throughout the Gospel of John. That theme is encapsulated in John 3:16.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

“Eternal life,” is not merely future promise but is “knowing Jesus (and God through knowing him) as a present reality.” John begins his gospel by telling us that Jesus is with God at the beginning of life.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.” –John 1:1

The truth that Jesus was present at creation has powerful implications for us throughout our lives. Thompson points out that “God who raises us to life at the end is the same God who gives us life in the beginning – who creates us.” John 1:14 teaches us that Jesus “became flesh,” entering our world, becoming one with us as he is already one with the Father. In John’s

telling of the blind man who was healed Thompson says we learn, “This One who created the world, who created light, is the light of the world and the One who gives man the light of seeing. The One who created life is one who raises all to life. Everything that has life has life from God.”

John records Jesus’ words in 10:10,

“I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”

Jesus speaks from a

perspective that “looks back to creation and forward to eternal life.” This abundant life includes the “grace upon grace that we have received as John records in 1:16. That abundant grace is evident in Jesus’ very first miracle when there was “more than enough wine.” Abundant grace is also evident when “12 baskets of food remain” after the feeding of the multitude. It is, emphasizes Thompson, – “not a stingy grace.” It is “life fully



given to world by the God of all life.” Jesus is the One who both “creates and sustains the world.”

These truths have impact for our “ethic of life,” says Thompson. Because God is a living God, “to do the work of God is to sustain, nurture, and do things

continued on back

Our view of God impacts end of life

Although we may be influenced in ethical decision-making by talk of “the patient’s rights” to do whatever he/she wants to do, or the “financial burden” of caring for patients, or the “quality of life” that a patient has or doesn’t have—none of these considerations really leads us any closer to the question of what to do in a given case that is both right and faithful in our life with God.

Richard Ayer, Lutherans for Life article 2005



Often individuals and families are faced with making difficult decisions about life sustaining treatments without having done any advance preparation. It can be an excruciating emotional experience and not the best environment for thoughtful and wise conclusions. The patient may not be in a position to indicate their desires. Common medical decisions faced at end-of-life include: Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR), Do Not Resuscitate Order (DNR), Do Not Intubate Order (DNI), and Artificial Nutrition and Hydration. Do we even know what these mean? How are we to make good decisions for ourselves and those we love at the end of life?

Sadly, a 2011 Gallup poll on Physician Assisted Suicide showed that Christian opinion on the topic was virtually the same as secular opinions: 45% thought it morally acceptable to have a doctor help you kill yourself; 48% felt that it was morally wrong. Educating ourselves and others in what the Scripture says about the God of life and our lives in relationship to him needs to be a priority of the church.

We are more than our earthly bodies

As Christians we believe we are more than our physical bodies. We are not to live “in the flesh” but “in the Spirit” according to Paul (Romans 8:9-10). Even though we die physically our Spirit lives on because *“he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.”* Because God is doing something in us at the end of life

continued on back

The Gift of Life, from page 1

that lead to life, not death.” “The Church’s mission is to work to cultivate abundant life, seriously and persistently.” Thompson described our lives as being lived out “under an ark” that is anchored at its two ends by “Creation and Eternity.” This should cause us to “examine our work in care of creation and in care



for the unborn.” This perspective also has importance for how we view the mission of the Church. “The One who created all the world (concrete manifestations) became flesh among us. God wants to bring people to faith in Jesus.” The Church is to manifest the life of Christ to the world. Like Jesus the Church is best when it does all that it does without regard to response. In fact, Thompson reminded, Jesus warned that if the world hated me it will also hate you (Jn 15:18-19). We can anticipate that we will often be ignored. “Life giving work does not breed gratitude.”

Jesus was not only representing his own love for us in giving his life but he was doing the will of the Father and revealing the Father’s love for us and the Father’s desire that we have life abundantly.

“I can do nothing on my own. . .because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.” –John 5:30

“God’s will,” said Thompson, “is to give life to his world whom he loves so much.”

Our view of God impacts end of life, from page 1

just as he forms us at the beginning of life (Psalm 139:13) we ought not to cut short God’s activity by hastening death. Our life continues after our physical death. Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though he die.” (John 11:25)



We come to the moment of death with hope

As Paul prepares for his own death he writes to Timothy (2Timothy 4:6-8, 18) with a deep peace that he has fulfilled God’s purpose for him on earth and “kept the faith.” Even though he has experienced suffering and knows that more may lie ahead, he looks to life beyond death and finds peace. God has applied to him the righteousness of Jesus Christ. No matter the circumstances of his death God will bring him “safely into his heavenly kingdom.”

We are not our own.

“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.” In life and death we trust God with all our being.

Coming articles: Palliative Care and Hospice Care, Pre-natal Hospice, Defining the Terms, Legal Forms.

Education resources for teaching a biblical perspective on end of life

“Created, Loved, and Called” a video series from Presbyterians Pro-Life teaching a Christian perspective from which to make life affirming, God honoring decisions. Learn more about this resource at <http://bit.ly/CreatedLovedCalled> .

Embrace the Journey - An 8 week DVD adult education series from Anglicans for Life to help you and your church apply God’s Word to end-of-life issues. Embrace the Journey discusses what the Bible teaches about mortal life and eternal life, examines the methods used to hasten death, discusses hospice and comfort care, health care proxies, practical steps to prepare for aging and dying, and the role of family and church in helping people Embrace the Journey of suffering death, and heaven. For more about this resource: <http://bit.ly/1iw1QGU> .

Websites with practical information on decisions at end of life

National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization - <http://www.caringinfo.org/>

The Center for Bioethics & Human Dignity - <https://cbhd.org/category/issues/end-life>

Lutherans for Life - <http://www.lutheransforlife.org/life-issues/end-of-life/>

Life Issues in the News

Refugee Crisis

Wewelcomerefugees.com is a website launched to position the global church to be a collective voice on this urgent and significant issue. Together we can become the hands and feet of Jesus creating welcome, nurture, and care for those caught in the current Europe/Syria refugee crisis.

For tools to help you talk with your church about responding to this crisis visit: <http://wewelcomerefugees.com/sunday>.

Defunding of Planned Parenthood

As Christians we have a moral obligation to speak on behalf of those being “led away to death” or in any way treated unjustly. Now is the time to be in conversation with your representatives and senators and let them know you do not want your tax money to go toward an organization that does 300,000 abortions annually. Ask them if they have watched the videos made public by undercover investigators and urge them to investigate whether PP is engaged in illegal activity selling body parts of aborted babies. If the horrific things seen and talked about in these videos are not illegal then the laws need to be changed.

For more information and tools to take action visit: CenterforMedicalProgress.org or <http://www.defundtoday.com/>

California’s battle with assisted suicide

The unborn are not the only lives that need our voice and our protection. Those at the end of life are also precious to God. In the State of California, three bills posing threats to human life and religious freedom are now on Governor Brown’s desk awaiting his signature or veto. AB 775, would require our Pregnancy Clinics to refer clients to places like Planned Parenthood for abortion, AB 1177 will allow Planned Parenthood to open new surgical abortion businesses without obtaining Hospital Transfer Agreements, and the Assisted Suicide bill AB2x15 passed.

For more information visit <http://www.legislature.ca.gov/> or call Governor Brown’s office (916) 445-2841) and ask him to veto all three of these bills.