

Abortion- is it always wrong?

Psalm 139, Luke 10:25-37



Last time we gathered for Thomas Place we explored the life of Mary, Jesus' mother and the mother of God. Who would have expected God to enter the world through this Jewish peasant girl, from an obscure corner of the Roman empire? In grace, Mary is chosen. God's messenger tells her: "You will conceive and give birth to a son... The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."

Not only was this announcement entirely unexpected, but set in motion

a whole train of scandalous events. A young woman had to announce to her fiancée that she was pregnant, while at the same time assuring him that she was still a virgin. Joseph was in world of emotional pain, when God also speaks to him, this time in a dream. After pondering whether he should simply divorce Mary quietly, "An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.'"



"What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit." This is the son of God, from the moment of his miraculous and divine conception. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." From fertilisation to embryo, from foetus to delivered child; this is the Son of God, the God "who made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness."

The Christian conception of the sanctity of human life begins with the divine creation of human beings as male and female, made in God's image. God confirms this dignity by entering into our world as an embryo. More than that, the incarnation points to the sanctity of life from this moment of conception. This life is gift from God. Our personal identity is continuous from when God gives life, in conception to birth, through maturity and then to death.



King David reflects on what this personhood means in relation to God, in the psalm we've just read: "13 For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.

14 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful,

I know that full well... 16 Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be."

In the biblical worldview, the unborn child is therefore a person, separate and distinct from the mother who bears it. If the unborn

child is a person, and this life is human life, then the taking of human life is wrong: “You shall not kill.” So the church cannot sanction abortion, for it is the taking of a life. This has been the position of the Christian church from its very earliest days, against the background of the Roman practice of infanticide. “The one inside the womb is indeed a human being whose life is defined by the incarnation of Christ who as the embryonic child redeemed all embryonic children. To those who speak of unwanted children ... every child is wanted by God.” (David Scaer)

But this can never be the end of the story. For so long the debate about abortion has consisted of people with strongly held convictions hurling abuse at one another. At times Christians have been guilty of the most hateful behaviour, secure behind the barrier of their theological position.

Focusing on the issue to the exclusion of the person, indeed people concerned, not just the unborn child, but also the mother, is exactly what Jesus condemned the Pharisees for. They were good at pointing out what was wrong in the behaviour of others, but didn't lift a finger to help.



We've heard Jesus' voice loud and clear today in the parable of the Good Samaritan. A teacher of the law engages Jesus in a theological debate about what one must do to inherit eternal life. The teacher knows his stuff. The answer is clear: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’, and ‘love your neighbour as yourself’.” A follower of Jesus is one who shows mercy on his neighbour.

This has two very clear implications. Firstly, the relationship between a mother and her unborn child needs to be viewed through the lens of neighbour. This is in complete contrast to the position taken by an early abortion advocate in the US, Lawrence Lader, who wrote back in 1966, incidentally the year of my birth: “Does the foetal tissue possess any more sanctity than an appendix or an or any other human tissue that is commonly excised when the mother's health is threatened?” From this question one can draw the following implication:



Therefore, “children have no inherent worth apart from the opinions of others [certainly no sanctity of life; hence the pro-abortion slogan: Every child a wanted child]. Abortion then becomes a matter of conscience and a personal and private decision...There is greater concern with the individual than with the other, the unborn child.”

However, for us who advocate for the unborn child as neighbour, we must remember the unborn child's mother. The mother who carries this unborn child is also our neighbour, and certainly not our enemy. Melinda Tankard Reist, the Australian feminist Christian writer issues this call: “The challenge for the church is not to stand at a distance and advocate a position, but to advocate for those in need. ...We can't help babies unless we help their mothers. The needs of mother and baby are intertwined. It's not rocket science. ...The church says it's against abortion and condemns abortion, generally speaking. And yet we are sending away 400 women a year [in Canberra, where she lives] who want to have their babies but can't find support. Multiply that across the country.

Why aren't the churches doing something to provide positive, life-affirming alternatives to give women real choice?"

Hear these words from a woman who works in a pregnancy support service: "I also have worked in the pregnancy care ministry for 6 years ... and it frustrates me to no end, when people focus on saving the life of the baby. You know what? If we save the life of the woman ... if we give her hope and acceptance and grace ... she will save her baby. And as Christians ... we expect others to have the same moral compass as we do ... they do not. God does not call us to be right ... He calls us to be good. Jesus didn't eat with the 'found', He ate with the 'lost!'"

Loving our neighbour involves doing the hard yards of sitting down beside them, seeking to enter into their world, and, as much as humanly possible identifying with their situation. For many woman who face unplanned pregnancies "the strongest mental frame of reference is deeply and singularly negative for women facing unplanned pregnancies. It threatens their self-identity, their social status and their very lives. Their self-worth, self-esteem and self-image are all in jeopardy of being exposed and forever damaged, if not destroyed."



How can we love our neighbour in this situation? There are three things that they need from us:

1. Acceptance

We can't stand in judgement over them. We are to exhibit unconditional love, for this is what breaks the power of shame. When you douse shame with loving empathy, it cannot survive.

2. Grace

Even though we may not have faced an unplanned pregnancy, and considered abortion as an option, or have gone through with that decision, each one of us has been forgiven by a Saviour who says that lust is the same as adultery and hate is the same as murder (Matthew 5:21-28). We all stand equally in need of God's grace, because he doesn't elevate one sin over any other. It took the blood of Jesus to pay for them all. This applies especially when loving our neighbour who has had an abortion. Never forget our human solidarity in sin, and the liberal generosity of God's grace. Let him or her who is without sin cast the first stone.

3. Support

Melinda Tankard Reist tells the story of a 17-year-old pregnant girl who wrote to her. "When she decided to keep her baby, all her friends called her a slut. If she'd had an abortion, no one would've known. But she decided to keep her baby, and she was struggling to find support services in her area. She's made such a brave decision, surely we should support her."



Helen Parker was a 20-year-old university student who found herself unexpectedly pregnant, far from home and alone. As she was without support nor any clear idea of what to do next, the doctor booked her in for a pregnancy termination. Ultimately, Helen chose to continue with her pregnancy and became a single mum, but the lack of discussion about options other than abortion raised many questions. Helen soon realised her story was being replayed daily in the lives of women across Australia.

She decided to do something about this and founded The Babes Project in 2009. It operates out of a Pregnancy Support Centre in Croydon, where life skills, counselling, peer support and case management are offered.

I'm not sure if Helen is motivated by a Christian conviction, but I do know that this is what loving our neighbour looks like. We do best when we speak the truth in love, and love in action. Amen.

