



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

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A Stephen Ministry Congregation

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“God of Life”

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“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth’” (Gen. 1:26-28).

COLLECT: O God, You see that of ourselves we have no strength. By Your mighty power defend us from all adversities that may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts that may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

God is a God of life. With his word of life, he created life. He said, 'Let there be,' and there was. In the beginning, *every* word God spoke called things into existence for the express purpose of creating, sustaining and perpetuating life. First the heavens and the earth, light, the sea and dry land, then plants, fish, birds, animals. These all set the stage for the most precious gift of life yet: human life, the crowning achievement of his creation.

In Genesis that which is good in God's sight doesn't become "very good" until man is made. You are not the blight of the earth that environmentalists would have you believe. God made you in his own image; male and female, he created you. He breathed into man the breath of life. The incomplete is now complete. The good is now "very good". And God rested.

Everything is in place for the procreation of life. It was God's good plan for us. But then something went horribly wrong. The problem was not with the plan. The problem was certainly not with God. The problem was with the man and the woman. You see, our first parents had a choice. God did not create them like insensate brutes driven only by instinct. They were persons made in his own image. They had free and full choice. We love this freedom God gives us. We don't want to be told by our government or anyone else where we can live or what we can read or who we worship. We love freedom and will fight to the death to defend freedom.

The God of life made us in his own image, and that image includes the freedom to make choices. But that old serpent Satan knew how to play on our human desire for the freedom of choice. He begins by instilling doubt in God's

Word, and confusion. “Did God really say ‘you shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’” Once he has them off balance, then comes a bald faced lie: “If you eat of this tree, you will be like God knowing good from evil.”

It seemed to Adam and Eve that so long as they couldn’t eat of every tree, they were not fully free. God was holding something back, and they had the right to know. “Why should God have a monopoly?” Satan’s deception complete, our ancient parents used their freedom to make a choice. And they chose the way of disobedience and death.

You know the story. Having rebelled against the God of life, everything falls apart. Adam and Eve lose the image of God. Now they are something other than what they were created to be. Now they are sinners. They’re still able to conceive, but the next generation is born not in the image of God, but of their parents. Sinners beget sinners. And where there is sin and disobedience, there is also death, for the wages of sin is death. Adam and Eve would die. Cain and his brother Abel would die. But it’s worse. Abel didn’t die of old age. No, Cain chose death for Abel. Of course, that’s not the plan of the God of life, but it became the sad story of human history. This sin has been passed down to you and me. No longer just a story of life, it was now a story of life and death . . . death by murder, death by choice.

God hasn’t changed. Change isn’t his thing. He remains the God of life, not of death. And though the discipline of Adam and Eve seems harsh, he doesn’t curse them. He reserves that unfettered wrath for the serpent. “Cursed are you! . . . You shall crawl on your belly and dust you shall eat all the days of your life.” He also promises a future battle with the serpent . . . the old English word is enmity, the same word as in “enemies.” “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers.” This would be a fight to the finish, but we are already told how it will end. “You will bruise his heel, but he will crush your head.”

Oh it would take a long time. God’s ways are not our ways, and his timing is not our timing. First, there was much

to teach his people about how to choose life and not death. For instance, the first commandment is “You shall have no other gods.” Keeping that commandment is choosing life. And he also had to show them over and over again that he could bring about life where it was never expected.

Remember Abraham and his wife Sarah? He promised them a child, even though Sarah was well past prime. But that was God’s plan. This human couple had made other choices. Abram tried to take matters into his own hands. He chose to have a child with an Egyptian servant named Hagar. But that wasn’t God’s plan. God had another plan. He brought life where there was no life, and his wife Sarah, barren and old, conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Isaac, which means “he laughs.” Remember how Sarah had laughed at God’s promise and plan? But God has the last laugh – it was the happy, joyful, and blessed laughter of God’s gift of life.

It’s a major theme in the Bible: God gives life where no life is expected. There was Manoah’s wife (Judges 13). She too was unable to have children, with no hope of new life. But God’s messenger came and told her that she would conceive and bear a son and that he would be a special child from his birth. You’ll remember him; his name was Samson.

Then, there was Hanna, wife of Elkanah. In fact, Elkanah had two wives. Remember? Peninnah and Hannah. Peninnah had children, lots of them. She pushed them out like little rabbits and she loved to flaunt her fertility before poor Hannah who could have no children. Hannah prayed and prayed and only in the Lord’s time was her prayer answered. She conceived and bore one son, and she called his name Samuel and God used Samuel as a prophet and as a priest. Throughout history the God of life keeps giving the gift of life, bringing about life where there should be none. Flowers bloom in the desert.

Finally, there was Elizabeth, wife of Zechariah, priest in Jerusalem. Again, lots of prayers but no children. Remember? The angel came to Zechariah and said, “Your wife Elizabeth will bear a son and you shall call his name

John” (Lk. 1:13). This child would also have a special role. He would prepare the way of the Lord. John the Baptist was another of God’s gifts of life.

Then, God had one more surprise, the ultimate gift of life. This time he came to a woman who was not at all past childbearing years but one who had not yet known a man. She was a virgin, engaged to a man named Joseph, but she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. A double miracle: not just overcoming the limitations of normal human conception, but going beyond nature, without benefit of a human father. We confess it every week. “He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.” John tells us more about him. “All things were made through him [that would include all life], and without him was not anything made that has been made. In him was life.”

He was the one who would crush the serpent’s head. He was/is our righteous substitute. In Psalm 51, David writes, “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me” (v. 5). But this one conceived by the Holy Spirit was without sin, so that he who knew no sin could be sin for us as a substitute. Not just on the cross, Jesus was our righteous substitute already in utero (before that even!), already in a fallopian tube.

The God of life “suffered under Pontius Pilate” and “was crucified.” The hands that created the universe bled to redeem the universe. But it was a self-giving, self-sacrificing, and innocent death for the sins of the world. His enemies chose death for him, but he was choosing life for us. The God of life “died and was buried.” He descended into hell to proclaim the victory. “Satan, you’ve lost. I’ve won. My people also win!”

True to form the God of life brings about life where none can be expected, and out of the tomb walks the risen Lord. We confess it every week: “He descended into hell, and on the third day He rose again from the dead and ascended into heaven.”

The God of life still rules the universe, but sometimes

it seems like things are out of control. Often this is because the children of Adam and Eve continue to use their freedoms to make bad and wrong choices. The children of Adam and Eve still listen to Satan's lies. So far we've fallen that sometimes we even think of death as a solution.

For example, there is an unplanned pregnancy, and the shame and sorrow that often follow. Finishing high school and going on to college will be problematic at best. And death, the death of the baby, begins to look like an attractive solution. We call it the freedom of choice, but somehow it's reminiscent of Adam and Eve using their freedom to choose death. That is not part of the plan of the God of life.

There comes a frightening diagnosis, and we fear the prospect of suffering. We hate it and think no good can come of it. Physician assisted suicide begins to look like a viable solution. We give it euphemisms like death with dignity, but there's nothing dignified about fleeing life and running towards death. Life is God's great gift to us, and to reject a gift is to reject the Giver of the gift of life.

Even in Watertown there are many who feel trapped, hopeless, maybe addicted, maybe with a kid or two but no family, a job but no money, a dingy and dark apartment, but no home. And that old Serpent again hisses his lies. "There is an easy way out" he says, "and it need not be painful." But that is not part of the plan of the God of life.

Maybe you've not honored God with your body and have not waited for marriage, and guilt gnaws away at you. Maybe you have had an abortion or have been involved in an abortion decision and you feel as if this sin is just too big to be forgiven. Maybe you were instrumental in an end-of-life decision. The plan seemed right at the time, but now you're not so sure. Did stopping the treatment allow someone to die or did it cause someone to die? The guilt and fear cycles on and off like the furnace on a cold day.

I'm here to tell you the God of life loves you nonetheless. He promises, "I created you. I redeemed you. There is no circumstance that can separate you from my

love. There is no circumstance beyond my power to help. There is no trouble so great that there is not some good I can salvage from it. My blood cleanses you from all sin. No stain of it is left behind. I have taken your wrong decisions with me to the cross. I have already suffered your condemnation. I give you my goodness. You are blameless now. My cross is on your forehead and heart. You are my redeemed child whom I love and will raise again to newness of life.”

In Christ, we know the pain of our broken lives, but the grace and love of God enables us start over again. In Christ, we embrace and forgive each other, fully aware of our bad choices, of our wrong choices because Christ has embraced and forgiven us. In Christ, we celebrate his gift of life with our lives and with the choices we make.

God is the God of Life. He gave you life when you were conceived and in Christ gives you new life. Amen.

