

Third Sunday after the Epiphany

Title: Vanquished to Victorious

Isaiah 9:1-4

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Sermon Outline

VANQUISHED TO VICTORIOUS

- I. The darkness of a vanquished people
- II. The light of the victorious God

Sermon

Losing a playoff game 12 - 10 is one thing. When you lose 42-0, you've been vanquished! "Vanquish" implies defeat to the point of hopelessness. Sin can do that. Sin should do that. Sin should vanquish us to the hopelessness of our ability to do anything about it. But God's Word brings good news for the vanquished.

GOD SHINES HIS LIGHT UPON THE DARKNESS OF HIS SINFUL PEOPLE AND RESTORES THEM AS JOYFUL VICTORS

I.

Words in our text describe the vanquished—"gloom," "anguish," "darkness," "deep darkness." While such words may very well describe the locker room of a defeated play-off team, in our text they describe God's people. God vanquished the northern kingdom of Israel, particularly the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali. He brought them "into contempt" (v 1) using the Assyrian army. God's people deserved this defeat because they constantly sought to worship and serve idols. They turned to the gods around them for help and hope. They rejected God's promises and God's ways and turned to ways that seemed right in their own eyes. Now they found themselves vanquished, anguishing in the darkness.

That probably sounds familiar to most of us. It should. Ever since Satan deceived Adam and Eve into seeing the forbidden fruit as a "delight to the eyes" (Gen 3:6), people like you and me have been doing what seems right in our eyes. We turn to the gods around us, to the solutions offered by the world to solve our problems, and to give us help and hope. We forget God's promises and God's ways and turn to ways that seem right in our own eyes. Then, sooner or later, we discover our way doesn't work. Things don't get better. Things get worse. We find ourselves vanquished, anguishing in the darkness of our sin.

Most of us can recall times when we made bad choices and decisions that just made things worse and caused us guilt and shame. On this Sanctity of Human Life Sunday, let's honestly and openly discuss one such sin, the sin of abortion. I know many of you would prefer not to discuss something so controversial and so politically charged. But more than anyone else, we as God's people need to be talking about this sin. For no

one else can so clearly define why it is wrong, and no one else can lift up in love and forgiveness those who have been vanquished by this sin.

Those vanquished by this sin would be among the first to tell us we need to clearly define why abortion is so wrong. One such woman wrote, “My heart’s cry is to be a flashing neon sign to those who will listen, to tell them how the devil would like to steal from them. I want to give the devil a bad day! Do what you can. Do all you can. The people must hear.”¹

Abortion is wrong because it is at its essence idolatry. The devil uses abortion to turn people away from God to do what seems right in their own eyes. Like some of the gods the people of Israel turned to, abortion demands child sacrifice. Oh, we don’t call it that. Satan is too clever to use words that describe the reality of abortion. Jesus didn’t call him the “father of lies” for nothing (Jn 8:44). So the devil covers this idolatry with words like “choice” and “rights” and “termination of pregnancy” and “products of conception.”

It is easy for any of us to be swayed by this Satan-inspired rhetoric. Legal abortion has been going on for so long that we have lost the reality of what it is. Abortion destroys a tiny, helpless human life. It does so brutally. It does so over 3,000 times each day in our country. What’s more, when you assault life you assault the creator and redeemer of life. Abortion just doesn’t destroy someone, but someone “knit together” (Ps 139:13) by God’s hands and someone for whom Jesus shed His blood and someone God desired to call into his eternal kingdom.

Abortion is wrong because it is idolatry. It leads God’s people to trust in the idol of death as a solution to a problem rather than the Lord of Life. But death does not rescue us from our problems. It plunges us into darkness. It produces “anguish” and “gloom” and “deep darkness.” As one woman wrote after her abortion, “You see, I didn’t just kill my child that day. I killed something inside of me, something that is now replaced with the knowledge that I too can do a very wicked evil.”² Abortion not only defeats, it vanquishes.

Many Christians, even those sitting in Lutheran pews, need to understand this. Many view abortion as a purely political issue that we shouldn’t be talking about. The devil loves that kind of thinking. For if we never talk about the idolatry of abortion, we abandon those who have been vanquished by it to the dark hopelessness of their sin. Those vanquished by abortion never hear that God has restored them, along with all sinners, as joyful victors.

II.

So let’s give the devil a bad day! “But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish” (v 1). “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light” (v 2). The reason for this victorious hope is profoundly simple: “on them has light shined” (v 2). Those who “dwelt in a land of deep darkness” (v 2) will see light, not because they “got their act together,” not because they weren’t feeling gloomy any more, but because God would shine his light upon them! God would bring victory to the vanquished!

He did! In a single night with a single angel, God destroyed the Assyrian army. In the morning, without the vanquished even aware of victory, a hundred and eighty-five thousand Assyrian soldiers lay dead (Is 37:36). God's victorious light would lift the yoke and burden of the oppressor (Is 9:4) and restore his people as joyful victors who divide the spoil (v 3). God's people went from vanquished to victorious in a single night!

We who walk in the deep darkness of our sin have seen a great light. The reason is profoundly simple. From today's Gospel, "And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: 'The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned'" (Mt 4:13-16).

We who dwell in the darkness of our sins, who struggle with sins' guilt and burden, have seen a great light. Not because we "got our act together," not because we deserve it, but because God's Word of grace took on flesh and dwelt among us. God brought victory to the vanquished!

In a single night with a message from a single angel, "And behold you will conceive in your womb . . ." (Lk 1:31), God entered the darkness of a sinful world in the darkness of a womb. Jesus' body was knit together there—a body necessary to live a holy life on our behalf, a body necessary to bear the "yoke and burden" of the punishment for sin upon a cross, a body necessary to be placed in a tomb and rise again in victory over sin and death. Baptized into this death and resurrection, God declares us holy and joyful victors!

That victory is big enough for every sin! No matter how great the gloom or how painful the anguish or how deep the darkness, the light of our victorious God shines upon us in Christ and brings forgiveness, hope, and newness of life. Whether our sin is the sin of a past abortion or the sin of ignoring the idolatry of abortion, God lifts the burdens of sin's oppression and declares us victorious.

Listen to one more quote from someone who had an abortion. "I never really understood that Jesus Christ was willing to get down into my muck and miry life and pull me up out of the sewage of my problems. He has since shown me that he really is."³ We can all make such a statement. Jesus Christ has come down into our "muck and miry" lives. He has pulled us up from the dark "sewage" of our sin into the bright light of his grace. In him, the vanquished become victorious.

¹ From a letter received at the National Life Center of Lutherans For Life, Nevada, IA.

² *ibid*

³ *ibid*