

Life Sunday Sermon 2015

Isaiah 40:1-2 “Matters of the Heart”

Rev. Dr. James I. Lamb, Executive Director, Lutherans For Life

www.lutheransforlife.org

Today we focus on those things often referred to as “life issues,” like crisis pregnancies, abortion, post-abortion syndrome, assisted suicide, and euthanasia. Such a list often causes red flags to go up. Maybe it did for some of you. Words such as “controversial,” “hot-button,” and “political” may come to mind and that leads to the conclusion held by many, “We should not be talking about them in church.”

Such a conclusion would be true if indeed the life issues were *only* controversial and political. But if these issues were also matters that touch people’s hearts with life and death decisions and challenge their faith, would we not be compelled to speak of them in church? So, are the life issues matters of the heart?

The word “heart” for the Hebrew described someone’s inner being or soul. Various Hebrew idioms reflect this. Joy may be expressed as a “leaping heart.” Grief as “evil of the heart” and guilt as being “struck by the heart.” But my favorite is the idiom used in our text to offer comfort to someone. “Speak tenderly to Jerusalem” is literally, “speak to the heart of Jerusalem.” And what a message their hearts would hear!

God’s people experienced much “evil of the heart” and they were “struck by the heart” because of their many sins and constant rebellion. But God in His mercy and grace wants to give them a “leaping heart” once again. What a joyful message He gives. “Her warfare is ended,” “her iniquity is pardoned,” “she has received from the Lords’s hand double for all her sins” (40:2b). In other words, if they deserved X amount of punishment because of their sin, they instead were given 2X the amount of grace from God! They would not get what they deserved and they would get twice as much of what they did not deserve!

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Twice as much grace—we could use that as well. We are so much like ancient Israel—rebellious sinners. We chase after other gods—love of money, love of possessions, love of self, love of pleasure. We could all make our list for you know in your heart your sins and you know in your heart your love of sinning.

Our sins flow from a corrupt heart. “What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person” (Mark 7:20-23).

And something else flows from bad hearts—nothing. Yes, nothing, failing to do what we know is right, failing to love and help others. John puts it this way, “But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?” (1 John 3:17)

Now, if the life issues are merely political issues, then we need not discuss them in church. But if they are matters of the heart that touch people’s souls and put our brothers and sisters in need and we have what it takes to deal with matters of the heart—the Gospel of Jesus Christ—but close our hearts to doing so, how can God’s love abide in us?

Are the life issues matters of the heart or political issues? You be the judge. She is sixteen, pregnant, and frightened. She knows she made a big mistake and doesn’t want anyone to know. Abortion seems like a quick and easy solution. But deep down she

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struggles with such a decision. She is confused and feels so alone. Is this a political issue or a matter of the heart?

Every day in this country such confusion and fear leads to nearly 3,000 babies being brutally destroyed through abortion. These are babies created by God, babies for whom Jesus died, and babies God wants to call into an eternal relationship with Him. Is this a political issue or a matter of the heart?

Another situation: After the abortion she first felt relieved that the problem was gone and she could get on with her life again. But she couldn't. Thoughts of the abortion haunted her. On the day her child would have been born she was physically ill and could not go to work. The guilt gnawed at her. Sometimes a drink or two helped, but only for a while. As a Christian, she knew of God's forgiveness in Jesus, but she never heard anyone talk about being forgiven for this sin. Perhaps it is too big to be forgiven. Is that a political issue or a matter of the heart?

At first he panicked when his girlfriend said she was pregnant. This would ruin everything. He would pay for an abortion. But then he realized this was his child. The circumstances were not ideal but how could he pay to have his child killed? He vowed to do what he could to help his girlfriend and protect his child. But then she called and told him the problem was over. She had an abortion. He was crushed, filled with guilt, and wept uncontrollably. Is this a political issue or a matter of the heart?

His beloved wife had a stroke. Recovery seemed so slow. She could eat, but needed assistance doing so. The wheelchair helped with mobility, but with only one usable arm she found it difficult to do much on her own. Her speech was slurred and had

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not improved for a long time. This was not the quality of life he knew she wanted.

Assisted suicide was legal in their state and he wondered if he should bring it up to her.

They were Christians. What would be so wrong with sending her home to be with Jesus?

Is this a political issue or a matter of the heart?

My friends, these are matters of the heart. God’s people deal with these situations and more. We have what it takes to speak to them. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is tailor made for such issues of life and death, pain and suffering, grief and regret and guilt. The Gospel speaks to the heart of that pregnant teen. It speaks of forgiveness and offers the presence and strength of Jesus. The Gospel speaks to the heart of that post-abortive woman and man. It speaks of forgiveness, a forgiveness big enough for any and all sins. The Gospel speaks to the hearts of those in situations involving disease, pain, and suffering. It speaks of a God who, as long as He gives life, gives life meaning and purpose. It speaks of a God who demonstrated His ability to bring good out of suffering through the cross of His own Son.

How can we possibly label these “political” and withhold the only thing that can speak to such matters of the heart? The Gospel is designed to speak to hearts, your heart, my heart, all hearts. The Gospel calls us to repentance. The Gospel cleanses our hearts and forgives the sins that flow from our hearts.

The Gospel speaks to our hearts these wonderful words, our “warfare is ended.” Through Christ we have peace with God. He loves us and nothing can separate us from that love. We can trust Him and turn to Him, not death, as the solution to our problems. The Gospel speaks to our hearts, our “iniquity is pardoned.” Please note, this is past

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tense. The forgiveness of our sins is an objective fact of history! It does not depend upon whether you “feel” forgiven. It does not depend upon whether you can forgive yourself. It depends upon trusting in the atoning work of Jesus already accomplished. The Gospel speaks to our hearts. Instead of the punishment we so richly deserve, we receive from the Lord’s hand twice as much grace that we do not deserve! We receive it in overflowing waters of baptism. We receive it through His abundant and Holy Word, and we receive it in His lavish and holy meal. We live surrounded by this “double grace” and nothing can touch our lives without passing through it.

The Gospel speaks to our hearts and calls us to action. “Comfort, comfort my people says your God.” “Speak to My people and the matters of their hearts.” How do you do that? First, be informed about how God’s Word speaks to the life issues.

Lutherans For Life can help with resources that are always Word-based and Gospel-centered. Be informed and then speak to people’s hearts. Speak through your prayers for those you know who are dealing with matters of the heart. Pray for our country that we might be restored once again to a respect for the inherent dignity of all life. Speak to fellow Christians and show how these issues are indeed matters of the heart. Speak with your actions. Walk beside those who have made mistakes.

Forgive them, love them, and help them in real, practical ways. Support local pregnancy centers [*Name those in your area.*] Speak through your compassion for those dealing with end-of-life concerns. Visit the home bound and those in care centers. Help them see the body of Christ cares. Support the families of these people.

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The list goes on. Lutherans For Life has a little booklet entitled *How You Can Speak* [www.lutheransforlife.org/article/how-you-can-speak] giving over 200 practical ways you can speak to these matters of the heart by sharing the Gospel in word and deed. Many congregations, when they recognize the importance of applying the Gospel to these matters of the heart, form Life Teams to assist in this on a regular and ongoing basis. Perhaps that is something this congregation needs to consider. If anyone is interested, let me know. Lutherans For Life can also help establish and train such teams.

I pray we have all grown in our understanding that the life issues are more than political issues. They are matters of the heart that touch people deeply. But the good news is, well, the Good News! The Gospel of Jesus Christ is tailor made for matters of the heart. May it speak to all of our hearts today with its message of forgiveness, comfort, and hope. Amen.