

**ST. CHRISTOPHER'S CHURCH
COBLESKILL, NY**

January 24, 2010 – EPIPHANY 3 (C) / SANCTITY OF LIFE SUNDAY

The Rev. Nina George Hacker

Sermon: *"To Life!"*

Nehemiah 8:2-10	(Ezra reintroduces the reading of God's Law)
Psalms 113	(Praise the Lord; bless God's Name forever more!)
1 Corinthians 12:12-27	(Although many, we are one in Christ)
St. Luke 4:14-21	(Jesus fulfills a messianic prophecy)

Jesus. He came to bring good news, pardon, recovery, and release to all who were poor, imprisoned, blind, or oppressed. He came to help the least and lost. In His first sermon, Jesus declared, "blessed are the poor in spirit ... blessed are those who mourn ... blessed are the meek ... blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake ..." Christ came to save all humankind, and to lift up the defenseless and those whose voices are denied.

And in our society today, the most defenseless and without voice are babies in the womb, persons with disabilities, and the elderly who are terminally ill. These are the most fragile, helpless, and dependent of our brothers and sisters. Yet we live in a culture that considers such human beings an inconvenience. An unwanted child is too much trouble to carry. A severely handicapped or brain-dead patient is too expensive and time-consuming to care for. It's so much easier to get rid of them. Dispose of them quickly, quietly, and with the complicity of medical professionals.

The euphemisms used to describe such premeditated murder include "Reproductive choice," "family planning," "death with dignity," and "euthanasia." When in fact, most often, mothers in crisis pregnancies are not provided with the truth or freedom to choose adoption, and last I checked, contributing to another person's demise was a crime. Throughout Christian history, so-called "mercy killing" has been treated as homicide.

So who endorses this? you might ask. According to a 2007 Harris Poll, 52 percent of Americans supported abortion, and 39 percent believed in physician-assisted suicide.¹ We are living in a culture that glorifies death. Think of the popularity of the "Saw" movies, and TV shows such as the three CSI's, Cold Case, Criminal Minds, and so forth. We've become so saturated with images of death and violence, and so enamored of convenience and disposability, it's becoming easier and easier to accept the killing of anyone who is not acceptable for whatever reason.

And what is the result of this mentality? Consider this: For all of the wars in which the United States has fought, from the 18th century Revolution through the current conflict in Iraq, the death count is still not quite 1.5 million. In World War II, six million Jews perished in the Holocaust. But since the 1973 decision by the U.S. Supreme Court known as *Roe v. Wade*, the lives of 51 million unborn children have taken—at a rate of 3,500 a day.²

The statistics on so-called physician-assisted suicide are not as readily available because this practice is only legal in the states of Oregon and Washington.³

But enough with the numbers. What does God have to say about all of this? Genesis 9:6: "Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person's blood be shed; for in his own image God made humankind." The Bible is clear that we are not to take the life of another person, whether that person is pre-born, in a coma, or 87 years old and suffering in agony.

When we end the life of another, we are killing someone made in God's image, someone Jesus loves so much that He died on the Cross for their sake.

In Job 31:15 (CEV), we read: God is the one who gave life to each of us before we were born." And Psalm 139:13-14 (CEV): You are the one who put me together inside my mother's body, and I praise you because of the wonderful way you created me." Not only does God bring into being every human life, but also, the Lord has plans for each and every person whom He creates. In Isaiah 49:1 (NIV), the prophet declares, "Before I was born the LORD called me." The prophet Jeremiah (1:5, NIV) writes, "The word of the LORD came to me, saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.'" And the Apostle Paul recognizes this, too, as he proclaims in Galatians 1:15: "God, who set me apart from birth ... called me by his grace ..."

The taking of an unborn baby's life hurts the child and its mother and father. The purposeful ending of a handicapped or seriously ill patient's life denies the individual the very dignity that proponents claim it provides, and cuts short God's plan for that person.

As a nation, we seem to have forgotten that God alone has the right, the authority, and the power to give and take life. Our "it's all about me" mindset repeats again and again the original sin. We care more about stray cats and wounded dogs than we do about babies and old people.

But fortunately, with Our Lord, there is always forgiveness. In His mercy, God provides daily opportunities to repent for what we have done, and gives us a chance to change our ways—or, to amend our beliefs and positions. Yes, Jesus loves pre-born babies and dying patients who want the suffering to end. But He also loves mothers who now regret their decision to terminate a pregnancy, and doctors who repent for having helped a patient to die an unnatural death.

Remember, Jesus came to save and help us, not to judge and condemn us (see John 3:17). He came that we might have "life, and life more abundant." I strongly believe that on this weekend when all across the country, Christians are celebrating the Sanctity of Life—ALL LIFE—God's Word to us this day comes from Deuteronomy 30:19 (NIV): "This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live."

The 18th century philosopher Edmund Burke wrote: "All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing." If we, as morally responsible Christians, are truly to choose life, as God has commanded us, what are we going to do, to take a stand amidst this culture of death? I'm not talking about politics—although it certainly isn't a bad idea to write your congressperson about these issues. I'm talking about sustained prayer for our nation, and about being a courageous witness to your friends, family, and neighbors when matters of life and death are raised. Remind them that no matter how tough the circumstance—and there is no doubt, ethical situations involving life and death are extremely difficult—God has the first and last word on human life. No matter what we want, need, or believe, only God can give or take life. And those of us who believe in Him are obligated to uphold that truth.

Even little children understand the basic right to life. Friday, I saw on television an interview with a woman who had been preparing a lecture on this subject, complete with some rather graphic, enlarged photos. She was concerned when her five-year-old unexpectedly burst into the room. But looking at the pictures, his eyes grew sad, and he asked, "Mommy ... who broke the babies?"

In your bulletins today, you will find an insert by Anglicans for Life, the only pro-life Episcopal / Anglican organization. I encourage you to learn more about them.

You may not know that the Diocese of Albany was the first Episcopal diocese to have ratified a canon affirming all life—from before conception to natural death.

Let us do all in our power to, along with Jesus, to build and encourage a culture of life and freedom, love and joy. We can support adoption efforts in our community, and monitor end-of-life care for those we know, to ensure that their passing is not hurried along unnecessarily by overzealous pain managers.

For ongoing ministry ideas, think about babysitting for a single mom; volunteering at a pregnancy resource center; visiting the sick and the elderly; donating to pro-life causes; mentoring a teenaged girl to model for her godly choices and chastity, or a young man, to demonstrate for him responsibility and integrity.

It's not easy to buck the prevailing tide, but Jesus can help. As THE Way, the Truth, and the Life, this is what He came for.

Along with our Jewish friends, let us declare: *L'Chaim!* To Life!

ENDNOTES

¹ [Harris Interactive](http://www.harrisinteractive.com/harris_poll/index.asp?PID=807) <http://www.harrisinteractive.com/harris_poll/index.asp?PID=807> 23 January 2010

² [ProLifeBlogs.com](http://www.lifenews.com/nat5910.html) <<http://www.lifenews.com/nat5910.html>> 23 January 2010

³ [Euthanasia.com](http://www.euthanasia.com/deaths2003.html) <<http://www.euthanasia.com/deaths2003.html>> 23 January 2010.