

People of the Ditch Life Sunday

It is tempting for good life-affirming folks, especially on this Sanctity of Life Sunday, to point to the Good Samaritan walking along the road and say, “You’ve got to be like him. He was pro-life! You’ve got to reach out to the vulnerable. You’ve got to protect and defend the unborn; help those in crisis pregnancies; reach out to those hurting because of wrong choices; show compassion to those suffering with chronic diseases, disabilities, and terminal illness. Yes, be pro-life like the Good Samaritan was.”

Included in these urgings, --whether they are made by the pastor to his congregation or members to their pastor or members to one another--may be a slightly arrogant attitude. “*I* am like the Good Samaritan. *I’m* pro-life. I am so pro-life that I know truly pro-life people do not use the phrase pro-life anymore, but ‘life affirming.’ I’ve got it right. You need to be like me.” Yes, it is tempting to start there. A lot of people do. “Be like the Good Samaritan who walked along the road.” But as Lutherans we can’t start there. We need to start in the ditch.

Al Lutheran, we do not approach the life issues with arrogance, but as people of the ditch who have been rescued from the ditch.

If we are going to be like anyone in the parable, we need to start by being like the man in the ditch: beaten, bleeding, helpless, forsaken, and left for dead.

In northern climates in the winter, ditches often fill with snow. The wind blows that snow into white waves—drifts of varying shapes and sizes. As long as they do not take over the road in front of you, they can be quite beautiful. But if there is a January thaw, the beauty melts away. The melting reveals dirty snow, rotting animals, garbage, used diapers, and a variety of empty alcohol and soft drink containers. The ditch is a filthy place to be.

But that’s where we need to start. We need to be people of the ditch. For when you melt away the facade of our self-righteousness, you’ll find we are all pretty dirty. We each have a corrupt and rotting nature—one that is beaten, bleeding, helpless, forsaken, and left for dead. But that’s good. Because when we realize our utter depravity,

we might just be able to have a very finite understanding of the infinite compassion shown by this guy who came walking along the road. He didn’t have to show compassion. He didn’t even have to stop. But He did stop. Then, astonishingly, He got down in the ditch with us!

A letter received at the Lutherans For Life office from a woman who had an abortion read in part, “I never realized that Jesus Christ was willing to get down into my muck and miry life and lift me up out of the sewage of my problems. He has since shown me who He really is.” Jesus is not only willing to get down into our muck and dirty lives, He did it. He came into the filthy ditch of our lives as He hung upon a cross, beaten, bleeding, helpless, forsaken, and left for dead. He absorbed the filth of our sin into Himself. He heals our wounds with His wounds, stops our bleeding by His blood, prevents our death by dying, and lifts us up and gives us new life through His resurrection from the dead.

He covers our impurity with His purity as fresh snow will undoubtedly cover those filthy ditches in white once again. “[T]hough your sins are like scarlet [ditch-dirty], they shall be white as snow ...” (Isaiah 1:18a). He brings us into this “whiteness,” this new life through faith given in the waters of Holy Baptism. He provides for our continued healing and growth as we recall that Baptism and as we share in His holy meal. He sets us back on the road with the certain hope of our own resurrection and eternal life always before us.

Now we can walk along the road and be like the Good Samaritan, or more precisely, be like Christ, but even more precisely, *be* Christ who, by virtue of our Baptism, lives within us. As we walk with resurrection hope before us, we keep our eyes on the ditch. We look for the lost, the beaten, the bleeding, the helpless, and the forsaken. When we see them, we dare not walk by on the other side. We *cannot* walk by on the other side. We cannot pick and choose. We cannot look at certain of the vulnerable and say, “That’s too controversial, I’m not touching that.” We cannot look at certain of the vulnerable and say, “That’s a political issue, I’m not touching that. It might make me unclean. People might not like me.” The love of Christ does not tell us we *should* reach out to all the people of the ditch; the love of Christ *compels* us to do so.

So when we see the embryo “in the ditch,” in that petri dish—vulnerable, helpless, and destined for destruction—we are compelled to speak and defend and help. And not because it is the right thing to do or the moral thing to do, but because it is the *Christ* thing to do. Our God became incarnate as an embryo, giving value to all embryos.

When we see the unborn “in the ditch”—vulnerable, helpless, destined for destruction—we are compelled to speak and defend and help. And not because it is the right thing to do or the moral thing to do, but because it is the *Christ* thing to do. His hands that were pierced and His body that died and rose again were formed in a womb, giving value to all who have resided there.

When we see the young woman in a crisis pregnancy “in the ditch”—vulnerable, helpless, feeling destined to make only one choice—we are compelled to speak and defend and help because it is the *Christ* thing to do. As He got down in the ditch with us, we get down in the ditch with her. We lift her up and offer Christ’s compassion in real, practical ways.

When we see post-abortive women and men “in the ditch”—vulnerable, helpless, destined perhaps to their own destruction—we are compelled to speak and defend and help because it is the *Christ* thing to do. As Christ, we get down in the ditch with them. We offer healing that can only come from the objective and complete forgiveness in Christ. We lift them up and walk beside them.

When we see those suffering from disease or disability “in the ditch”—vulnerable, helpless, destined by many to assisted suicide or euthanasia—we are compelled to speak and defend and help because it is the *Christ* thing to do. For Christ reveals a God who knows about suffering not just because He’s God, but because He suffered. We have a message of a God present in suffering, at work in suffering, and accomplishing His purpose in suffering.

As we “walk along the road,” we do so as citizens of this country. We are compelled to pray for our president, our representatives and senators, and our supreme court. We pray for change in our policies and laws and in the attitudes of those who make them.

But we also walk along the road as citizens of heaven. We walk united in Christ. We walk remembering our unique perspective as Lutheran Christians. For we know what it is like to be in the ditch, and we know Who came into the ditch to save us. We know the power of His crucifixion and the power of His resurrection to heal and restore. We know His message changes hearts and changes lives. That is the message we are called to proclaim. That is the message we are called to be. We are people of the ditch who get down in the ditch and help people of the ditch. It is the Christ thing to do. Amen.

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