

WORSHIP RESOURCES FOR LIFE MINISTRY



THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD



WORSHIP RESOURCES FOR LIFE MINISTRY

CONTENTS

Introduction	4
Lament and the Litany	5
Psalms	6
Scripture Passages	7
Hymns	9
Prayers	10
Devotions and Sermons	14

INTRODUCTION

IN OUR DAILY FAMILY PRAYERS, in our school chapel services, in the daily prayer offices and in the Divine Service, we thank and praise our Triune God for His gift of life. Throughout the Church Year, there are some special occasions that your congregation, school and families might like to mark with a special emphasis on the sanctity of human life. We have created this resource to assist you in preparing for worship services, prayer gatherings and group meetings. You will find suggestions for prayers, hymns and Scripture passages. Included also are sermons preached by pastors at previous LCMS Life Ministry events that may be used for your personal or group devotions.

The Sunday lectionary with its propers does not necessarily need to be displaced for the sake of other causes or purposes. Christ is to remain at the center of our preaching and worship in the Divine Service. The Church Year aids this, while at the same time providing many appropriate occasions to address issues of life as the readings suggest them (e.g., the Feast of the Holy Innocents, the Annunciation, the Visitation). The suggestions contained in this document will be helpful for informing choices around the lectionary and for other occasions where preaching, teaching and prayer on the topic of life is required. We also have other special service outlines, such as one in memory of abortion victims, available at lcms.org or by emailing LifeMinistry@lcms.org.

We pray that these resources will be a blessing to you. May the Lord who breathed life into Adam cause human life to be held in high esteem among all people, until at last He frees our bodies from sin's sad corruption and raises us to eternal life at the coming of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

LCMS Worship and LCMS Life Ministry

LAMENT AND THE LITANY

OUR LORD HAS GIVEN US THE PRIVILEGE of approaching Him in prayer. There are times when we cry out to Him with great emotion, such as with our sadness and horror over callous attitudes toward human life and death. The psalms of lament plead with God and express sorrow for our own sin as well as that of all mankind. We may pray them together with the Litany to ask God to bring an end to a culture of death. Consider praying one or more of the penitential psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130 or 143) followed by the Litany (*Lutheran Service Book*, pp. 288–289, and *LSB Altar Book*, pp. 410–413, with an option to sing on pp. 414–421). The Litany is also available for download on the LCMS website at lcms.org/doc/life-litany.

PSALMS

THE PSALMS GIVE US GOD'S OWN WORDS with which to marvel at His creation, thank Him for His constant care, lament the evil world's folly, pray against life's enemies while leaving vengeance to God, repent of our own sins and temptations, gain insight into the goodness of life, and remember that this life is not to be compared or held above the life of the world to come.

Note: Psalms in italics are not in the LSB Pew Edition. Boldface identifies the psalms that may be of particular interest.

- | | | | |
|----|---|-----|---|
| 8 | The special dignity of mankind in dominion over other earthly creatures, fulfilled in Christ. | 71 | God's preservation from mother's womb to old age. |
| 10 | <i>Prayer against oppression.</i> | 73 | Christian confidence in an evil world and in this failing flesh (especially vv. 25–26). |
| 12 | <i>Lament human opinions and might that fight against God's Word.</i> | 82 | <i>Prayer for rulers to rule justly, and a warning of their mortality.</i> |
| 14 | (See also Psalm 53.) Insight into the atheistic and sinful mindset that despises life. | 90 | Moses' psalm about death, the wages of sin and the work of God; teach us to number our days. |
| 25 | Pardon the sins of my youth (vv. 6–7, 11); seek the wisdom and mercy of God. | 100 | God made us, not we ourselves. |
| 30 | Confidence in the resurrection of the body; no profit in death (vv. 2–3, 9–11); comfort in grief (vv. 5, 11). | 102 | Penitential psalm and lament; God sets the number of our days, hears our prayers and preserves posterity (vv. 23–28). |
| 31 | Our life and times are in God's hands (vv. 5, 12–16); the whisperings of those who wish to end life. | 127 | The Lord preserves marriage and gives the blessing of children. |
| 37 | <i>Wisdom: Life does not consist in riches, but in righteousness and in posterity, which God protects and sustains.</i> | 128 | The Lord blesses with spouse, children and posterity. |
| 41 | The Lord preserves life; insight into the enemies of life. | 139 | Wonderfully made and known by God (especially vv. 13–16). |
| 49 | Life is precious, not money (vv. 5–9), not pride (vv. 10–14); expectation of the resurrection of the body (v. 15). | 146 | Trust in God, not rulers. God creates and helps the oppressed. |
| 51 | Penitential psalm and lament; "in sin did my mother conceive me." | | |

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

THERE ARE MANY PASSAGES IN GOD'S WORD that speak to the sanctity of human life. Below are some selections that you may find edifying for preaching and instruction to focus on God's gift of life.

Note: Boldface identifies the psalms that may be of particular interest.

- | | | | |
|----------------------|---|-------------------------------|--|
| Genesis 1:26–31 | God creates man (male and female) in His image; He sets him above other creatures. | Matthew 2:16–18 | Herod murders the innocents of Bethlehem; Rachel weeps for her children. |
| Genesis 9:1–7 | God renews His blessing on mankind and all creatures, but distinguishes man from beast; He forbids murder because man is made in the image of God. | Matthew 5:13–19 | The church is to salt and give light to the world. |
| Exodus 1:15–22 | Hebrew midwives fear God and refuse to kill newborn sons in Egypt; childbirth is blessed by God. | Matthew 8:23–27 | “Save us, Lord; we are perishing”; Jesus calms the storm. |
| Deuteronomy 32:39–47 | The Lord kills and makes alive; Moses gives a final sermon: not an “empty word for you, but your very life.” | Mark 6:14–29 | John the Baptist preaches against sexual immorality and is martyred; his body receives an honorable burial. |
| 1 Samuel 2:1–10 | Hannah's song in thanksgiving for a child; the Lord kills and makes alive. | John 8:1–12 | Christ shows mercy to a woman caught in adultery. |
| 2 Samuel 1:1–17 | David mourns even the death of evil king Saul and orders that his “euthanizer” be executed as a murderer. | Romans 8:18–23 | All creation is subjected to futility through human sin, yet in the hope of the resurrection of the body. |
| 2 Kings 17:6–13 | God destroys Israel with the Assyrians because of their idolatry and immorality, including child sacrifice. | 1 Corinthians 3:16–20 | We are God's holy temples; beware this world's futile thoughts. |
| Job 1:20–21 | The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away. | 1 Corinthians 6:12–20 | Honor God with your body; flee sexual immorality. |
| Isaiah 49:13–16 | Though parents abandon their children, the Lord does not abandon Israel. | 1 Corinthians 15:20–28 | In Adam all die, in Christ all will be made alive; death is an enemy, the last to be destroyed. |

2 Corinthians 5:14-21 **God in Christ has reconciled the entire world to Himself; the message of reconciliation is entrusted to the church.**

Philippians 1:18c-26 **To live is Christ, to die is gain; Paul is prepared to honor God in life or death as God determines.**

2 Timothy 4:1-8 The Gospel is to be preached even when “out of season”; many will not endure sound teaching.

1 John 1:5-9 God is light and truth; the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin; God is faithful to forgive the penitent.

Revelation 5:1-14 Christ alone is worthy; by His blood He ransomed people from every tribe, language, people and nation.

HYMNS

THE HYMNS OF THE CHURCH JOIN THE CHURCH in a sung confession of Christ and His truth. The following hymns address various issues surrounding the church's testimony to God's gift of life: the universal atonement of Christ for the sins of all people, the proclamation of the Gospel, boldness to stand firm in a hostile world, God's care and protection of His creatures, the family estate, love in word and deed. The numbers listed indicate the *Lutheran Service Book* hymn numbers.

395	"O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright"	755	"In the Very Midst of Life"
403	"O Savior of Our Fallen Race"	777/78	"Grant Peace, We Pray, in Mercy, Lord"
533	"Jesus Has Come and Brings Pleasure"	820	"My Soul, Now Praise Your Maker"
553	"O Christ, Our Hope, Our Heart's Desire"	823/24	"May God Bestow on Us His Grace"
557	"Seek Where You May to Find a Way"	828	"We Are Called to Stand Together"
559	"Oh, How Great Is Your Compassion"	829	"Christ the Eternal Lord"
562	"All Mankind Fell in Adam's Fall"	830	"Spread the Reign of God the Lord"
576	"My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less"	834	"O God, O Lord of Heaven and Earth"
585	"Lord Jesus Christ, with Us Abide"	839	"O Christ, Our True and Only Light"
655	"Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word"	862	"Oh, Blest the House"
662	"Onward, Christian Soldiers"	863	"Our Father, by Whose Name"
696	"O God, My Faithful God"	864	"Shepherd of Tender Youth"
708	"Lord, Thee I Love with All My Heart"	866	"Lord Jesus Christ, the Children's Friend"
713	"From God Can Nothing Move Me"	874	"O Splendor of God's Glory Bright"
716	"I Walk in Danger All the Way"	977	"I Will Sing My Maker's Praises" <i>(available in Lutheran Service Builder)</i>
735	"Have No Fear, Little Flock"		
740	"I Am Jesus' Little Lamb"		

PRAYERS

THE FOLLOWING COLLECTS AND PRAYERS may be offered for various issues and specific situations related to life, its protection, its loss and its place of honor among us. For more prayers and resources, see the *LSB Altar Book* (pp. 427–470) and the *Pastoral Care Companion*, both available from Concordia Publishing House.

A comprehensive prayer for life:

O God, Creator of life, You knit us together in the wombs of our mothers and You desire us to have life. So also Your only begotten Son took on our flesh in the womb of His mother and entered this world as all children of men do — except without sin — so that He might be one with us and make us Your children. Look in mercy and love upon all the precious lives of children yet unborn. Guard them and give them growth, that they might come to the saving water of Holy Baptism and a saving knowledge of Your Son. Protect and guide all pregnant mothers, that they would treasure the new life they are given to bear and not be dismayed by fear of pain or cost. Strengthen all fathers, that they would protect and provide for both mother and child so that all would be cared for in this world. Encourage young people to get married, and encourage husbands and wives to desire the gift of children, that they might be fruitful and multiply according to Your gracious will. Finally, visit with Your grace those who have committed awful sin by destroying life in the womb. Bring them to repentance, but do not let them sink into despair. Forgive and heal their souls, that they would trust in the Child of Mary who was killed for their sin and rose again to give everlasting life; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

That all would come to the knowledge of the truth: (Psalms 14 and 53) O Lord, You look from heaven and see the children of mankind. You see the corruption of minds darkened by sin, the ignorance of evildoers who eat up life like bread and imagine that You do not see. Yet, You desire that all would be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. Correct the hearts of those who foolishly deny God. Send forth the salvation that comes from Your Son's cross and resurrection. Turn the hearts of those who have

become enemies of life, and give them knowledge and understanding; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

To turn hearts:

O Author of life, You did not reject our first parents who chose themselves over Your promised care, but You gave them the hope of a marvelous salvation from sin's futility in Eve's very Offspring. Turn the hearts of all who will not know You, who believe they hold the power of life and death, and who trust in the choices of the sinful heart over the promises of God. Bring them into the knowledge of what is good, that they may know the profound value of all human life, which You have created and redeemed, and the everlasting truth of salvation in the Offspring who has crushed Satan's head forever; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

To value all human life:

Heavenly Father, by Your Spirit You breathed life into Adam and made him a living being. By Your Son, Jesus Christ, You redeemed Adam and all his descendants from sin and every corrupting effect, which at last You will remove forever when creation is restored in the resurrection. Convince us by Your Word and Spirit of the value of all human life. Where life is fostered and preserved, let us give thanks; where life is vulnerable or abused, give us courage; where life is fragile and debilitated, give us compassion; and where life is injured and dying, point us in hope to the resurrection, where He who does all things well will make all things new; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

To end abortion:

(Psalm 10) O Lord, the wicked say in their heart that You have forgotten. They murder the innocent and imagine

that because others do not see it, neither will You. Arise, O Lord God, and lift up Your hand to put an end to the evil of abortion! Have mercy on our nation, hear the desire of the afflicted, incline Your ear and work by Your might, that men of this earth may strike terror on the unborn no more; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Lord of life, we thank You for creating us, giving us life and providing us opportunity to serve our neighbors. You command us to defend those who cannot defend themselves. Look with mercy on our unborn brothers and sisters, and spare them from abortion. Direct us to speak and act in their defense within our vocations. Turn the hearts of people from selfishness and fear to love and joyful service. Bring those responsible for the deaths of others to repentance and eternal freedom in full forgiveness through the atoning death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, our Lord; who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. Amen.

For government and judicial officials:

Almighty and everlasting God, who rules all things in heaven and earth, give Your wisdom to the leaders of this government and nations throughout the world, that they may seek to govern with justice and compassion. As they create policies and legislation, cause them to defend the lives of all people. We pray for judges and court officials, that they may seek to do what is right in Your eyes and that all their decisions would be founded in justice and truth; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

For expectant mothers vulnerable to abortion:

O God, our merciful Protector, arise with counsel and comfort for all expectant mothers vulnerable or pressured to seek abortion. Give them clarity of mind to see death for the enemy that it is, open their eyes to possibilities when they can see no other option, and give compassion to Your church, that she may be eager and ready to apply the balm of Christ's forgiveness and love to them; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

To remember those whose lives have been ended in abortion:

Dear Lord, in great sorrow we remember before You the lives of many children that have ended in abortion. We mourn their deaths and cry out to You for mercy. In our despair, fix our eyes on the hope of Christ Jesus, who died for all; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

For those grieving abortion decisions:

The Lord sees and knows us in the womb. He alone knows the hearts of all, and He knows how far it hurts or destroys people more than we do.

(Isaiah 43:25; Psalm 32:7) Merciful Father, You have promised that for Your own sake You blot out our transgressions and will not remember our sins. By Your blessed Gospel, forgive the sins of those who grieve past abortion decisions, and give them certainty that Your Son's absolving blood was shed to cover this very guilt and shame. Give readiness by Your Holy Spirit to pastors and Christian friends, that they may be surrounded by constant acclamations of their deliverance; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

God of all consolation, You have known us from the womb and still know the thoughts of our hearts. You alone know how wide the swath of devastation is spread through the bodies, souls and memories of mothers, fathers, friends and family from the choice of abortion. To the hardened, grant honesty and repentance; to the guilt-ridden, give a clean conscience through the forgiveness of Christ; and to the divided and broken, bring wholeness in the Body of Christ and the hope of His resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

For parents and family of babies who have died in miscarriage or stillbirth:

O Father who stitches together body and soul, O Jesus Christ who dwelt in the womb of the Virgin Mary, O Holy Spirit who enters through the ears and instills faith: Comfort now those parents who mourn the loss of life. Send Your holy angels to bear them up lest they strike their foot against a stone. Stir up Your people to deliver to them the words that will bring them peace, and draw those who mourn to the place where all believers in heaven and on earth join in communion with one another; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

For the expectant mother whose baby has died and must be delivered:

O dear Lord God, how great is our anguish that the mother's womb You have prepared to create and sustain life has now become as a casket! In a moment, all our joy and expectation has been turned to ashes. Put our tears into Your bottle, our sorrow into Your book, and take this child into Your arms of mercy. Give courage and protection to *name* for her delivery, and overcome every despair with the certain hope of the resurrection, where we shall never again labor in vain or bear children for calamity, but

be with Christ, we and our descendants with us; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

For those who are barren or experiencing infertility:

Lord God, heavenly Father, You created the first human family with Adam and Eve and commanded them to multiply and fill the earth. We pray for those who have the desire to have a family and multiply but remain childless. For those who remain unmarried, fill the barren areas of their lives with brothers and sisters in Christ; for the married couples struggling with infertility, fill their emptiness with contentment in Your Son, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

For parents who have lost children:

Almighty and everlasting God, You give and You take away, and You do so in ways and thoughts that are beyond our understanding. Comfort all parents who experience the sorrow and grief of a child who has been given to them in life and taken away in earthly death. In times of sadness, strengthen their faith, console them in Your compassion, give them understanding of Your love, point them to the Body of Christ who bears this burden with them, and grant them hope in the resurrection; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

For the womb to be fruitful:

O God, before our first parents fell into sin, You commanded them to be fruitful and multiply. Give grace to those who wish to fulfill Your holy commandment. Open the womb of our sister, *name*. Grant her and *name* many arrows in their quiver, that they may bring glory to Your name. Save Your people and bless Your heritage, O Father, for You live and reign with the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Almighty God, You are the Lord and Giver of life. You knit each of us together marvelously in the womb, You give life to the dead, and You call into existence the things that do not exist. Be gracious, we implore You, to *name* and *name* and to all husbands and wives, and grant them the gift of children. Bless her womb and make it fruitful, and give him constancy and patience as a husband, that they may raise the next generation of saints to faith in Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Thanksgiving for childbirth:

Creator and Preserver of all things, we give thanks that You formed this child in the womb and gave him/her life. We thank You for Your gift of motherhood and for safely

bearing *name* through labor and delivery as You brought this new life into the world. Bless all women who are with child, granting health and safety through pregnancy, labor and delivery; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

For parenting:

Lord and Giver of life, look with favor upon those to whom You've granted the blessed vocation of father and mother. Let them always rejoice in the gift of their children. Strengthen them to train up those children in Your ways, not provoking them to anger, but raising them in the ways of the Lord. Enable them to provide for their children and to be godly examples of faith, hope and love, that the children's lives would be physically sustained in this life, and spiritually sustained now and for the life to come in eternity with Christ; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

For people experiencing depression:

O loving Creator, at the dawn of creation You said it was not good that man was alone. Open Your ears to hear our lament, and give us eyes to see that You have provided us with a family in our local congregation in which we may thrive and bear much fruit. Strengthen those who are depressed and calm those who are anxious, that they may learn to take solace in Your churches, where You have promised to be in their midst. For You live and reign with the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

That the lives of people with disabilities would be valued:

O Champion of the meek, open our eyes and soften our hearts, that we may see the beauty in all humans — not because of the symmetry of their face or the number of their limbs, but because they are made in Your holy image. Open our mouths so that we may not speak hastily, but always act in love toward our neighbor; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

For mercy and supporting life:

Lord of life, You create and bless all life with Your abundant care and mercy. Make us ever mindful of the many blessings You have given to us in this life. Move us to share Your mercy, protecting and supporting that blessing of life for all people, especially the unborn, the elderly and those who suffer in the body. Keep us steadfast in Your Word of life forever; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

For people affected by suicide:

Gracious Father, our life and salvation are in Your hands. Look with mercy upon those who remember in sorrow

the death of their loved one in a way of that loved one's own choosing. In their times of trouble, let them not be crushed; in their times of doubt, let them not be in despair; in their darkest grief and sorrow, deliver them by Your Word of comfort. Sustain them in the love of Christ from which we can never be separated, until that day when death shall be no more at the glorious return of our Savior, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

To end assisted suicide:

Almighty God, as You continue to give life, You give value to that life; it is not ours to take away. We earnestly pray that in those places where assisted suicide is legal, the laws would be changed, and that new attempts to make it legal will fail. Work on the hearts of those who espouse this path to death, and lead them to repentance and the forgiveness of Christ. Bring a stop to their practice, a change in their laws and a willingness to allow people to live until their natural death. Give us hearts that value life — from conception to natural death — as You do; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

For people vulnerable to assisted suicide:

(Psalms 31 and 90) O Lord, our life is spent with sorrow and our years with sighing as we waste away under sin's deadly effect. Be gracious to all who wither under illness, debility and age. Do not look away from them in their distress, but be present with them. See also how they have become an object of dread to many, how they are forgotten, how many whisper and scheme around their bed to be rid of them. Rescue, O Lord! Preserve the faithful and thwart those who act in pride. Let all acknowledge that our times are in Your hands, both in fact and in faith, and commit all of life into Your hands, O Lord, faithful God; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Christ's atonement:

Merciful Father, we confess that the wages of sin is death and that all die because all sin. Yet, we give You thanks that though in Adam all die, in Christ all shall be made alive. Your Son has shed His blood for all people and by His cross has reconciled the world to You, that trespasses should no longer be counted against anyone. Give us confidence in this salvation, fully accomplished in Your Son, and enable us by it to look with love toward every human life as one for whom Christ shed His saving blood; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

For the human body:

O Lord, You have fearfully and wondrously made us, body and soul, and by the gift of Holy Baptism, Your

Holy Spirit dwells in us, making our bodies Your own temple. Grant that in every word and deed, in life and in death, we would treat the human body with respect and confess with our bodies the great gift of life You sustain despite every sin and corruption of this earth; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

For the integrity of the human person:

Almighty and everlasting God, You are the Creator and Sustainer of life, and You have magnificently made us creatures with mind, body and soul, created to work in perfect harmony. We thank and praise You that, though these have been corrupted through the fall into sin, through the resurrection of Your beloved Son and through Holy Baptism You have revealed that You have fully and wonderfully redeemed us in mind, body and soul, which will once again be in the perfect harmony You intended on the day of resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Hope in the resurrection:

O Almighty God, You did not allow Your Holy One, our Lord Jesus Christ, to see corruption, but raised His body from death for our justification. Just as He ascended bodily into heaven, so He will return at the Last Day to raise us in our bodies to be immortal and glorious as He is. Keep us always mindful of this certain hope in the resurrection, that we would confess Your gift of life while in this body, and that we would confess the expectation of the resurrection to eternal life when we lay our bodies to rest in death; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

For growth and joy in life:

Heavenly Father, of Your goodness You created us and sent Your Son that we may again have life and have it abundantly. For the sake of Christ's cross and by virtue of His resurrection, our lives do not rush inevitably into death, but we pass from death to life. Mindful of this joyful path that lies before us into eternal life, lead us to delight in Your creation and in every wholesome enrichment for bodily life free from fear of what tomorrow may bring. Grant that we daily grow, learn and enjoy the creation You have made and redeemed, which soon You will restore when Christ comes in His glory; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

DEVOTIONS AND SERMONS

THIS SECTION CONTAINS SERMONS that were preached at LCMS Life Ministry events. They are offered here for your devotional reading individually, or with a family or group.

In Him, You Are Made Alive

By Christopher S. Esget

“This man dealt treacherously with our people, and oppressed our forefathers, making them expose their babies, so that they might not live” (Acts 7:19 NKJV). “So that they might not live.” That’s the first martyr, Stephen, recounting the slaughter of Hebrew babies. Stephen uses an interesting expression: “So that they might not live.”

It’s the same expression used in today’s epistle: “I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things” (1 Tim. 6:13 ESV). “Who gives life.” It’s all built on the word *Zoē* — like the girl’s name or zoology. You go to a zoo to see living things.

When that word is used about humans, it means a decision about leaving someone alive. Pharaoh exposed the Hebrew babies, “so that they might not live.” He didn’t leave them alive.

But whenever it means to give life, God is the subject, the doer. “I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life.” Man cannot give life, we can only let live — or not let live (aka, murder). Only God can give life. Only God has the power of life in Himself.

St. Irenaeus said, “God makes, man is made.” *Deus facit, homo fit.*

That’s the problem: We have forgotten we are made. Made *by God*. Yes, yes, you believe in creation. But don’t run so quickly past it. Psalm 100 hints at the implications: “Know that the Lord, He is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves” (Psalm 100:3 NKJV).

The godless philosophy of our age has cast aside God for the myth of mutation. And make no mistake: That’s not science, that’s philosophy masquerading as science. “It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves” — but we

ourselves cast aside God with every act of covetousness. We rebel against our Father when we calculate how much money a child will cost, as though He who gives life will not give us our daily bread. We rebel against our Father when we look at evil images, as though a human body is an object to be used and discarded. We rebel against our Father when we worry about tomorrow, as though He does not order our days.

When we put off praying, we confess, “He has not made me, but I make myself.” With every thoughtless bite of food; with every evening that ends without confession and thanksgiving; with each consent to greed, gossip, revenge or lust; with every lie, we believe *the* lie: that we can be as God. In a thousand small, insidious ways, our lives say, “It is not He who has made us, but we ourselves.”

The problem is not abortion. Abortion is the symptom of the problem you and I have. We have lost God as maker. And with that loss, we have forgotten that we *are* made, that we stand as recipients of His life, under His ordering and stewards of His gifts. The culture of death infects us all.

Into this culture of death, into this world of death, steps Jesus. In Him was life. That familiar passage in John’s Gospel about Jesus, “In him was life” (John 1:4 ESV), can in fact be translated this way: “That which has come to pass in Him was life.”

What in heaven does that mean? It means that for God, life is not a static thing. It’s not a *thing* at all, as though we could find and possess life the way we might take hold of a basketball or a burrito. Life is not a thing, but in God it is an activity, a continual self-giving. Life is almost, then, a verb, an action, like love.

The things that have come to pass in Jesus are His self-giving. He becomes a fetus in Mary’s womb; He becomes a

crying infant, cold and hungry; He becomes a desert wanderer, starving and tormented by demons; He becomes the subject of slander and spitting; He is whipped and pierced; He is laid in the tomb. Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. That's where life is found: in the crucified Jesus.

Today is St. Timothy's day. Our hymnal calls him pastor and confessor. Not everyone is a pastor, and a pastor is not a superior Christian to others. But St. Timothy's day is for all of us, for every one of us is called to be a confessor.

Who do you say Jesus is? That's your confession. Are you one of His disciples? That's your confession.

Today we don't confess that we are against abortion. We are, of course. But that's not quite it.

Today we don't confess that we are pro-life. We are, of course. But that's not quite it, either.

Today we confess that God gives life to all things. God makes, and we *are* made.

He makes life, and we leave alive.

Like the Hebrew midwives, we cannot stand idly by when Pharaoh "[exposes] their babies, so that they might not live." We have an obligation to the victims of society. It is not enough, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, to bandage the

wounds of those crushed by the wheel of injustice — "we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself."

This afternoon in the March for Life, and all year long, we demand an end to the injustice of abortion. We demand an end to the injustice of human trafficking, pornography, slavery and the separation of children from their parents.

But we do so as confessors. We confess that we are sinners, great sinners, with the culture of death flowing in our veins and pulsing through our corrupted brains. And we confess that the life we need is found only in Jesus.

"[One] man dealt treacherously ... making them expose their babies, so that they might not live." But another Man has come. The things that have come to pass in Him are life. He makes, and in Him you are made alive.

The Rev. Christopher S. Esget is LCMS fifth vice-president and senior pastor of Immanuel Evangelical—Lutheran Church and School in Alexandria, Va. This sermon was preached prior to the 2020 March for Life in Washington, D.C.

"Today we confess that God gives life to all things. God makes, and we *are* made. He makes life, and we leave alive."

God's Word on Life

By Alfonso Espinosa

First John 1:1–4 says: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life — the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us — that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete." Amen.

The introduction to St. John's first epistle, which is called the "prologue," might seem like a formality. The first four verses of the chapter are one long sentence. Kind of fancy, but just how important is it? It is so important that I cannot overestimate its crucial contribution as to why we are

gathered. It is God's Word on life. These first four verses are precisely what we need to hear and know and walk in as we live in the United States of America in 2019.

These words, given to the apostle John by the Holy Spirit, are as applicable and necessary for today as they were in the first century. In our time, whenever the Christian church has something to say about how we live — what is often referred to as "morality" — those from the culture doze off and consider our faith as just another opinion among the plethora of ideas marking our age of confusion, pluralism and relativism. The world sees at least two shortcomings among those who confess Jesus.

First, we are stuck in a system lacking objectivity while relying on religious conviction. This is how we are judged by the current rationalism. Since the true Christ — very God of very God, begotten not made, risen from the grave — is put into the same category as the Easter Bunny and Frosty the Snowman (viz-a-viz Richard

Dawkins and company), our very sanity is suspect. Die-hard Christians are viewed as trapped in their subjectivism and fantasy world, but even worse a fantasy world that is bigoted and unaccepting (and therefore unloving). Actual truth — according to the world's view — is free from the bondage of religion and exudes unbiased knowledge. The new enlightenment considers a new standard: No one is wrong, except for those who assert that others are wrong (which, of course, is a self-defeating position). The next time someone accuses you of pushing your beliefs on others simply because you believe in right and wrong, then note the contradiction and ask, "So, you think I'm wrong and you're right?"

Pull out your baloney-detector when you hear someone assert, "There is no such thing as absolute truth!" Think about it.

This is the sort of deception that goes on in the public-square argument that claims pure objectivity to the exclusion of all religious influence. Only objective views should enter the secular public square, while religion stays in its corresponding places of worship and in the private home. This is lunacy. Everyone brings their religion to the public arena as surely as they bring their brains, minds and souls. People are, by definition, body and spirit. No one leaves the spirit resting on spiritual moorings behind in their closet before entering the public square. Everyone's religion is inevitably seen and heard. "You will recognize them by their fruits" (Matt. 7:16). "Test the spirits to see whether they are from God" (1 John 4:1).

This view by the way — which claims objective neutrality — is anything but objective and neutral, and is as religious as religious can be. Satan is extraordinarily religious and wants his advocates to deny truth by embracing a pseudo-truth. His so-called truth becomes everyone doing "what was right in [their] own eyes" (Judges 21:25) — a tell-tale sign of a culture that has lost its way. Judas Iscariot sinned more severely than Pilate did, but Pilate still spoke Satan's words to Christ: "What is truth?" Again, this is alive and well today.

St. Paul didn't go along with the illusion of the objectively neutral public square. He spoke intelligently, reasonably and logically to the Athenians at the Areopagus, but at the same time he was honest: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious" (Acts 17:22).

Second, for many in the culture it is not that the Christian faith lacks objectivity, but that it is not subjective enough. This is a modern pietism. Ironically, it leads to the same bankruptcy as modern rationalism. Here, the Scriptures

might be revered, but at the end of the day they are not authoritative.

This modern form of mysticism relies on the intuition and spiritual experience, not the Word, and thus it leads to the conclusion of rationalism: Each person must decide for themselves what is true.

"Luke, you must feel the force around you."

As much as the rationalist needs to hear of the pivotal historical event that is the resurrection of our Lord, which bears the mark of eyewitnesses in real history, the pietist needs to be directed to the reliability of Holy Scripture.

The pietist, mystic or extreme religionist convinces themselves that what is right is what feels right. The Christian who loses his way goes through this progression: 1) from "this is the Word of the Lord," to 2) "I think this is what the Word means," to 3) "God told me and is telling me." Once God starts talking directly to a person, watch out. Such a position might agree that we ought to defend the life of the unborn because it seems self-evident to them that the unborn child is fully human, but to this same person, same-sex unions do not feel this way. The one murders, the other "loves." How can anyone say this is wrong? What has happened? God's Word is set aside.

Rationalism be it in the form of naturalism, atheistic Neo-Darwinism or philosophical materialism — where all that matters is matter (as in atoms and molecules) — thinks you, Christian, are wacko because you believe in fairy-tales.

Pietism — be it in the form of mysticism, exalted intuition, occult practices wrapped in Christian clothing, or hyper enthusiasm swallowing the Holy Spirit (feathers and all) — thinks you, Christian, are lacking the Spirit because you are bound to a book.

But Christians, lest you think I stand here demonizing those pesky rationalists and pietists of the 21st century in Washington, D.C., and wherever you came from, we must also look within ourselves at the little rationalist and the little pietist who have taken up residency in our sinful flesh.

We, too, are like the once-doubting apostles. "Unless I see ... unless I feel..." (John 20)! We need, however, to be like St. Augustine who taught that the Lord has indeed

"Everyone brings their religion to the public arena as surely as they bring their brains, minds and souls."

given us to see and feel like the first-century apostles. They saw and felt Christ in the flesh, and we see and feel the miraculous fulfillment of Christ's Word called the one holy church, which still beholds Christ through Word and Sacrament.

The apostles could not see and feel the fulfillment of the promise of the church to all nations numbering in the billions, but they believed while they saw Christ in the flesh. We trust that Christ is risen from the grave even as we now see the fulfillment of the promise: "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18).

Yes, the Lord is still merciful to help us in the narrowness of our rationalism and in the fervor of our pietism. Against our pietism, the Lord keeps us grounded in "this is the Word of the Lord," the Creeds and our confession also expressed in our rich liturgy and hymnody. And the Lord protects us from our limiting rationalism with the mystery of the Sacrament so that we dare not try to put God in a box.

But if we ever give into either extreme, we make ourselves ineffective for defending life. These extremes are too consumed by the truth of self; they make us too self-absorbed to the extent that the neighbor is no longer truly loved. Sin makes us too concerned for our own standards of truth. How can we be concerned about a standard outside of us that says, "If we do not love our brothers, then we do not love God," when we are too busy with our self-standards of truth?

St. John wouldn't stand for this. St. John wouldn't accept these extremes. He knew that if either extreme was accepted, then life itself was lost.

Here in the prologue to 1 John, St. John nips both these challenges in the bud.

To know life, dear Christians, is not to know an idea, a concept, a philosophy or a feeling. There is only one way to know life. We must get out of ourselves and know Jesus Christ, who is the Life!

In 1 John 1:1, St. John wrote: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life." Those who accuse Christians of holding onto a dream can't stand these words. "The word of life" — the very source of life is Jesus Christ. This is the One the apostles saw. They saw the marks of the nails in His hands; they saw His side from where the blood and water flowed. They saw these things for covering the sins of the world, and yours! He was no

mere idea — no silly "Jesus of faith" — but the Jesus who was from the beginning, before anything else was made that has been made, who came into the flesh to be heard and seen and touched. Things don't get any more real than this.

And the eyewitnesses who gave their lives "to proclaim" and to write testified that the Life — Jesus — made life manifest. How? In healing, in proclaiming with transforming power, in love for those unloved, in defending, in feeding, in having compassion, in treating all He served as gifted with life and so the objects of His love. And whether the manifestation of life was witnessed by Elizabeth when John leapt in the womb, the transfiguration or the resurrection, or in making once demon-possessed Mary Magdalene the first witness of His resurrection, Christ's life was manifest, and it still is. He is manifest in you, Christian.

"There is only one way to know life. We must get out of ourselves and know Jesus Christ, who is the Life!"

You might wonder if this could really be true. What is it in you that makes it true? It is not what is in you that makes it true, but rather it is what you are in. St. John, you see, connects life (mentioned three times) to fellowship (mentioned twice). How do we know we are of Christ, who is the Life? It is to be in the fellowship of the apostles.

First John 1:3 says, "That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ."

How incredibly vital is our holding to the apostle's teaching, the holy Creeds, the Word of Christ, because to have these is to have fellowship with the very first-century apostles, and did you hear the rest of it? Their fellowship was with the Father and Christ. Now follow the chain: Since you are in fellowship with the apostles, and since their fellowship was with God, then the syllogism is complete — your fellowship is with God! We know unity with God through a common confession, and we know unity with God through a common love. You confess Christ as the Life, and you manifest His life as He leads you to love all.

And now for the last part of the prologue. First John 1:4 says: "And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete." What follows life? What follows fellowship? Joy! And nothing can rob us of this joy! It streams from Christ who is overflowing LIFE; it rests secure in Christ by

the fellowship He has won for us so that even when we are persecuted, our joy remains!

When we were gathered here in 2017, an objector to our witness angrily ran into our group during the March for Life. As we marched straight ahead, here came a human projectile of a woman spewing venom against us. She rammed the side of my parishioner, Dr. Mary Hobus. It was unsettling to see this, of course, but not only did Dr. Hobus not retaliate, but she began immediately to pray for this one for whom Jesus died and rose! How could our

sister do this? Because she had God's life in Christ, she had fellowship with God through Christ, and she had the joy of God by Christ! This is yours too! March for LIFE! Be secure in your fellowship with God! And rejoice! And I will say it again, rejoice! This, too, is God's gift to you in Christ, with whom you have fellowship and through whom you have life.

The Rev. Dr. Alfonso Espinosa is senior pastor of St. Paul's Lutheran Church of Irvine, Calif. This sermon was preached at the 2019 LCMS Life Conference in Washington, D.C.

**Making
Disciples
for Life** 



THE
LUTHERAN CHURCH
MISSOURI SYNOD

lcms.org/life  *lcmslife*