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Our Saviour Lutheran Church
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Pentecost 4

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. AMEN.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, I want to do something a bit different today for this time of our sermon.

I want to talk about the recent Supreme Court decision regarding Roe v. Wade.

I pondered talking about this last Sunday, but the news of Supreme Court's decision was still too fresh.

It had only been made public last Friday, two days before last Sunday.

And coming off vacation, I wasn't exactly ready to tackle the issue.

I myself just needed some more time to digest and process the news and collect my thoughts

So, I want today to talk about the Supreme Court decision.

And I realize that we may be tired hearing about this news item.

We may be tired seeing the marches on our television screens.

We may be tired listening to the talking heads discuss what this means for our nation and for women in general.

Some of us may not want to hear me talk about this from the pulpit this morning, *thinking this is not a religious matter.*

But I felt compelled to share with you this morning some words regarding the decision.

And, most importantly, I felt compelled to inform you specifically about the ELCA's stance when it comes to abortion.

For this may be part of the conversation of which we are unaware.

We may be unaware that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the ELCA...

We may be unaware that the ELCA has a social statement outlining its stance when it comes to abortion.

Now, maybe we thought that our church being a church is strictly pro-life.

Maybe we thought that the ELCA is strictly anti-abortion.

But that is not exactly how the ELCA's social statement reads.

Now, allow me to preface all this by stating that you can go the ELCA's website and read the social statement on abortion for yourself.



Simply go to elca.org and type in the search engine there the word "abortion," and you will find the link to the church's social statement on abortion.

And let me pause here and actually back up a moment to explain what a social statement actually is.

For it should be noted that the ELCA has social statements on various important social issues, including the Death Penalty, Human Sexuality, the Criminal Justice System, Peace, Race, Genetics and others.

But what exactly is a social statement?

Well, at the ELCA's website, it says this in regards to social statements: "This church shall develop social statements ... that will GUIDE the life of this church as an institution and INFORM the conscience of its members in the spirit of Christian liberty."

So a social statement is a document that has been developed by a taskforce consisting of church leaders in the ELCA in

collaboration with the church body as a whole that addresses a particular issue in society.

Let me say that again, a social statement is a document that has been developed by a taskforce consisting of church leaders in the ELCA in collaboration with the church body as a whole that addresses a particular issue in society.

And the important word there is “collaboration.”

Social statements aren’t issued from one or a few people from on high deciding how the church is supposed to think.

No, social statements are meant to develop from the work of Spirit working within the whole body of Christ in the ELCA.

So then, when the ELCA develops one of these social statements addressing a particular issue in society those church leaders working of developing the statement, that taskforce will solicit feedback from everyone and anyone in the ELCA, any church member, who is interested to submitting feedback.

Indeed, many churches will actually conduct a study group in their church to discuss the particular social issue at hand, and those study groups in churches throughout the ELCA will oftentimes submit their insights to the taskforce working on the development of the social statement.

So, yes, the development of the social statements is meant to be a collaborative effort involving the whole ELCA.

And the resulting draft social statement is then presented to the ELCA churchwide assembly, which consists of voting members throughout the ELCA...

The draft social statement is presented to the ELCA churchwide assembly for approval.

So, for instance, the ELCA's social statement on Abortion was approved at the churchwide assembly meeting in Orlando, Florida, in 1991.

And the "approved" social statement then is meant, as it says on the ELCA's website, to be a "guide" and a means of "information."

Do what these social statements say, have to be what you yourself believe as member of the ELCA? No.

Because you are an ELCA Lutheran, do you have to subscribe 100% to what is stated in a given social statement? No.

The statements are just meant to help all of us understand the issue better from one particular perspective, namely the perspective as seen through the lens of the Lutheran doctrines.

And, this is where then the rubber meets the road, as they say.

Because we Lutherans do not read the Bible the same way as other Christians.

That may sound a little strange, but it is an extremely important point.

We Lutherans do not read the Bible the same way as other Christians.

Indeed, depending on how a particular denomination, depending on how (a particular Christian body) reads the Bible, depending on how ~~we~~ interpret Bible, ~~our~~ ^{the} ethics and the way ~~we~~ respond to issues in the world varies.

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So, let me give you an example using the Catholic faith.

The Catholic faith reads and interprets the Bible through the lens of “life” as paramount.

And so, whatever nurtures “life,” whatever promotes “life,” that is the guiding principle by which they conduct their ethics.

That is how the Catholic faith lives out its Christian mission in the world—whatever fosters “life.”

And so, this explains why, for instance, the Catholic faith is opposed to birth control. This explains why the Catholic faith is opposed to abortion.

Because the Catholic faith reads and interprets the Bible through a particular lens, namely "life."

But this is not the same lens by which Lutherans read the Bible, and so our ethics, the way we live out the Christian mission is a bit different.

Lutherans read and interpret of the Bible through lens of grace, through Christ Jesus.

Of course, life is of great importance and you see that in the social statement on Abortion, but grace also enters into the equation.

So then social issues for Lutherans are not always so cut and dry, so black and white, because when we are dealing with grace, there is always some gray area in between.

Think about Jesus Christ in his own ministry.

Jesus interpreted the Bible differently than his contemporaries, such that Jesus broke the Sabbath laws.

He healed people on the Sabbath. He allowed his disciples to pluck grains of wheat on the Sabbath. Jesus allowed for work to be done on the Sabbath, because Jesus said the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath.

Jesus redefined the Sabbath, because Jesus interpreted the Bible differently than his contemporaries.

So, yes, there are different ways to read and interpret the Bible.

And let me qualify all this by saying, that we should not judge other people just because they do not read and interpret the Bible the same way we do.

The different faith doctrines that are out there in the world are in some ways like the different colors of the rainbow, but we should not say that green is better than blue, or red is better than orange.

It is just our spirit may resonate better with a certain religious doctrine and another person's spirit resonates with a different religious doctrine.

But we don't judge others because of their doctrine.

With all that said, Lutheran doctrine does indeed read and interpret the Bible through the lens of grace.

And as such, the social statement on abortion allows for some gray area.

For instance, in the ELCA's social statement on abortion it says these words.

“The language used in discussing abortion should ignore neither the value of unborn life nor the value of the woman and her other relationships. It should neither obscure the moral seriousness of the decision faced by the woman nor hide the moral value of the newly conceived life. Nor is it helpful to use the language of ‘rights’ in ABSOLUTE ways that imply that no other significant moral claims intrude. A developing life in the womb does not have an absolute right to be born, nor does a pregnant woman have an absolute right to terminate a pregnancy. The concern for both the life of the woman and the developing life in her womb expresses a common commitment to life. This requires that we move beyond the usual ‘prolife’ versus ‘pro-choice’ language in discussing abortion.”

We see how Lutherans steer away from “absolutes” so as to allow for grace to enter in.

The social statement also says, “This church (the ELCA) recognizes that there can be sound reasons for ending a pregnancy through induced abortion. (The ELCA) recognize(s) that conscientious decisions need to be made in relation to difficult circumstances that vary greatly. What is determined to be a morally responsible decision in one situation may not be in another.”

Again, Lutherans allow for grace, depending on the situation.

Finally, let me read this section to you:

“Laws should be enacted and enforced justly for the preservation and enhancement of life, AND should avoid unduly encumbering or endangering the lives of women.”

There is the focus on life, without losing sight of grace.

Furthermore, it says:

“Because of ELCA’s conviction that both the life of the woman and the life in her womb must be respected by law, this church opposes:

- 1) the total lack of regulation of abortion
- 2) opposes legislation that would outlaw abortion in all circumstances
- 3) opposes laws that prevent access to information about all options available to women faced with unintended pregnancies
- 4) opposes laws that deny access to safe and affordable services for morally justifiable abortions
- 5) opposes mandatory or coerced abortion or sterilization
- 6) opposes laws that prevent couples from practicing contraception
- 7) and opposes laws that are primarily intended to harass those contemplating or deciding for an abortion.

I hope this provides a little more perspective on the ELCA’s stance on the issue of abortion.

But again, I would encourage you to read for yourself the whole statement.

My own feeling on the matter is that I personally can't begin to imagine the emotions a person experiences when discerning whether or not to abort a fetus.

No doubt it is already a terribly difficult moral decision to have to make, without including the issue of possible criminal consequences.

All the more, something else keeps coming to my mind in all of this.

It is something Margaret Atwood once said.

If we didn't know, Margaret Atwood is the author of that rather famous book *The Handmaid's Tale*, which describes a fictitious dystopian society in which women are subjugated within a totalitarian patriarchal society.

The book explores the themes of the loss of female agency and individuality and the suppression of women's reproductive rights.

I had the chance to hear Margaret Atwood speak in person and I remember one thing she emphasized very clearly in her talk.

She said that that which is a common theme in dystopian societies is this: there is a government that imposes absolute control over women's bodies.

Now, some of us might not agree with Margaret Atwood.

I mean she is only writing fiction books after all, right?

But I think of that remark from Atwood—that a dystopian society is one where a government imposes absolute control over women's bodies, I think of that remark and personally I can't help but find the decision by the Supreme Court a week ago Friday to be more than a little frightening.

But I think that enough said for this morning. Thank you for indulging me, so as to do something a little different today during the time of our sermon.

May God continue to lead our country and help us all navigate this difficult issue of abortion rights. In Christ, we pray...Amen.