

As we gather for our fourth and final sermon in our Advent midweek series, I wanted to take some time to recap what we talked about. We have talked about four baby boys in the Bible in preparation for the birth of that special baby boy later this week.

We started the series with the firstborn son born to David and Bathsheba who died on the seventh day. We learned that we can have hope even in the face of stillbirth, miscarriage, and death before baptism because our Lord is gracious and is even able to work faith in the hearts of the youngest who hear His word.

Next, we discussed baby Moses and the culture of death into which he was born. Our modern era also has a culture of death. You can dress it up with whatever fancy term you want, but we struggle against a culture of homicide and suicide. Nonetheless, we have peace because we see the beauty of creation through Jesus who redeems the universe through His birth, life, death, and resurrection.

Last week, we discussed baby Samuel. In a world where we grasp for control, we can have joy when we realize all blessings come from God. Treating blessings as blessings we can encourage women to offer children up for adoption, and we can support barren couples by letting them into our lives as well encouraging them to explore adoption or foster care.

Many churches aren't having a fourth Advent Midweek Service but thank you all for joining us tonight. On this winter solstice, we gather on the longest night of the year, and I felt the need to provide our community a safe alternative to the pagan rituals that may be going on around us on this longest night of the year.

I am only half-joking. As Christianity declines in the west, our culture isn't getting any less religious. Instead, many are choosing to worship the creature rather than the creator. As they do so, we will also find the value of personhood will be declining. However, JESUS GIVES US LOVE TO SEE HUMANS AS PEOPLE.

I want to go three places with you tonight. First, I want to talk about John the Baptist. Second, I want to talk about Dr. Seuss. Lastly, I want to talk about Jesus.

First, I. John the Baptist demonstrates even fetuses are people. We need to understand who John the Baptist was. He was the last, greatest Old Testament Prophet. Prophets in the Old Testament had the primary job of pointing to the coming Savior. We see this especially in the books of the prophets in which the best and clearest foreshadowing of the Messiah are. We think especially of Isaiah, but all the prophets look to Jesus.

John the Baptist sits on a precipice between the Old Testament and the New Testament, and his entire ministry is to point to the coming Savior. In his case, he has the privilege of literally pointing his finger at Jesus and saying, **“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”**

However, it didn't just start when John was an adult. It started from before his birth. As you may know, John the Baptist and Jesus are cousins born six months apart. When Mary visited Elizabeth, John the Baptist leaped in Elizabeth's womb. We read, "**And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit,**" It is from this that we get our sermon title: "A Bouncing Baby: Life is Love... Even in the Womb." Even in the womb, John the Baptist pointed to Jesus.

I'm going to take the liberty to assume six months pregnant means 26 weeks gestation. These are some things that the Bump.com says about a 26 week old fetuses. At this time, John was around 14 inches long, and 1.7 pounds. The baby was as big as a head of kale. The Bump.com comments, "Feel baby kicking and jumping and wiggling? Talk to them! They can hear you and may respond to the comforting sound of your voice." It also adds, "Baby is getting their immune system ready for life on the outside by soaking up your antibodies. And baby's eyes are forming, and their eyes will soon start to open, if they haven't already. Can you believe your 26-week fetus has already grown eyelashes? Soon, they'll start batting them."

In our day, a baby 23 to 24 weeks old can survive outside the womb, but it's risky. A baby born that early in Jesus' day would not have likely survived, but just to think, John the Baptist was a viable little dude at the time of Mary's visit.

This entire sermon series was inspired by the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* this past summer. I find it no coincidence the decision was announced June 24th, 26 weeks ago. The Church has historically celebrated the nativity of John the Baptist who is six months older than Jesus. I know on that day that we commemorated John's conception in Elizabeth's womb, infants across the United States leaped for joy at the news that abortion would be harder to procure across our nation.

It's quite simple, what is in the womb is a human person. Luke uses the word βρέφος which is translated as baby in our text. Across the New Testament, the word is used interchangeably for infants inside and outside the womb. Of the eight times that it is used, twice in this text, the other six times are used to describe infants outside of the womb, but there seems to be no distinction in the Bible.

Second, talk about Dr. Seuss and the classic book *Horton Hears a Who*. Of course, Dr. Seuss didn't have abortion on the mind when he wrote this, but many of the arguments that Horton uses to advocate for the whos also apply to unborn children. Our second point, II. A person's a person, no matter how small.

A quick synopsis, Horton the elephant finds a speck floating through the air and with his big ears, can hear a voice from the speck. He finds out that this speck contains an entire city of small creatures called whos. His jungle friends write him off as crazy and want to boil the speck in Beezle-nut oil. Horton talks to the whos in Whoville and ask them to make as much noise as they can to let the other

animals know they're there. Finally, as the mayor of Whoville rounds up every who from greatest to least to make noise, the animals can finally hear them and their doom is averted.

This is my segue to bring out the acronym SLED. We can tell that the life in a mother's womb is a person because of Size, Level of Development, Environment, and Degree of Dependency.

First, size, and it's summed up in Horton's dictum, "A person's a person, no matter how small." It didn't matter how small the whos were, they were still people that deserved life. Likewise, just because a human is small doesn't make them any less of a person. I'm not more valuable of a person than a toddler because I'm heavier or taller than a two-year-old.

Second, Level of Development. I, a fully grown male capable of abstract thought and reproduction, am not more of a person than a baby who is incapable of reproducing or complex thought. A baby born at 26 weeks may be on life support and only able to drink milk, but that doesn't make him any less of a person.

Third, Environment. The whos in Whoville were still people, even though they were floating on a speck in the jungle. The difference between a fetus and a baby is just a few inches through the birth canal. Not a whole lot changes from the day before a baby is born to the day a baby is born other than their environment.

Fourth, Degree of Dependency, the Whos were completely dependent on Horton for them to survive the onslaught of Horton's skeptics. Just because I earn a living wage for my family and can cook some foods without burning them doesn't mean I'm more valuable or more of a person than a baby. Yes, fetuses rely entirely on their mother, but so do newborns.

It was sound that made Horton's skeptics believe that there were people on that speck, and we can be thankful for sound to help us believe. The ultrasound has opened a window into the womb such that we can have detailed week to week descriptions of a child in the womb such as on theBump.com and have a different fruit or vegetable that a child in the womb approximates in size. Ultrasound technology wasn't introduced in America until years after Roe v. Wade was decided. We didn't know now what we knew then about life in the womb.

I would venture a guess that the animals in the jungle could hear the whos in Whoville all along, but they chose not to listen. Why? Because then they'd have to come to grips with the fact that they proposed boiling the town Beezle-nut oil. Maybe they'd boiled plenty of specks just like that for fun, and they don't like to think about other microscopic towns they destroyed.

Even while Dr. Seuss was alive, pro-lifers wanted to use this book as an allegory for abortion like I am in this sermon. He made it clear there was a different allegory in mind. I'm sure none of us would have guessed this in a million years, but it was about the post-war occupation of Japan after World War

II. Dr. Seuss had a prejudice and hatred for the Japanese until he visited Japan and made friends with a Japanese fellow, and decided they weren't all bad. Perhaps we could rephrase the saying in the book, "A person's a person, even if they're Japanese." Now, that doesn't have the same ring to it...

But I think the point is well-made. It doesn't matter if you're an unborn child, Asian, African, Samaritan, homeless, learning disabled, or what have you. All are made in God's image. All deserve love.

But we can only love with the love we have been given. I want to talk about Jesus last. III. Jesus gives us the ability to love others as people. In our Gospel text, Mary is acting as Jesus' messenger, and her greeting sets off the fireworks. John leaps in Elizabeth's womb and Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit and proclaims that Mary is the mother of her Lord.

It is clear that many people in those days paid as much attention to John the Baptist and Jesus as those animals in the jungle paid attention to the whos in Whoville. Yet those who did realize who John the Baptist and Jesus were had their lives radically changed.

Jesus showed us what it meant to give dignity to every single human being with whom he interacted. He healed the sick and lame. He ate with tax collectors and sinners. He talked to Samaritans. He welcomed the thief on the cross into paradise. He welcomed even infants, again the Greek word βρέφος, that He might bless them.

He forgives us for our indifference for the least of these. He forgives us if we've had an abortion or encouraged someone else to get one. He forgives us of our indifference, not lending our voices to the cause when it requires all hands on deck. He forgives us for treating others like numbers or statistics rather than people bought and redeemed by the blood of the lamb.

As we let the Gospel get a hold of us. The Gospel that caused John to skip in the womb and even sacrifice his life. The Gospel that redeems sinners. The Gospel in which Jesus dies and rises again to affirm that humans are people worth saving. As *that* Gospel gets a hold of us, we are filled with love to see that others are indeed people, persons endowed with dignity and rights, from greatest to least, and from biggest to smallest.

JESUS GIVES US LOVE TO SEE HUMANS AS PEOPLE. As we quickly approach Christmas, may we be filled with God's love to love others just as Christ loved us. Amen!