

SERMON 1

The Meaning of Life: A Gift from God

First Sunday: Life Is a Gift to Be Defended From Any Who Would Take It

*“My parents say they don’t want to be a burden. They want to die with dignity.
Is that OK?”*

Sermon Text: Deuteronomy 32:39

Sermon Theme & Parts: -

My Life is the LORD’s

- I. It’s a First Commandment Thing*
- II. It’s a Common Sense Thing*

* Substitute the word “Issue” if you prefer more formal parts

Dear Property of the LORD,

“Death with dignity.” It sounds good, doesn’t it? “Death with dignity.” That would be nice. That would be proper. None of us wants to be a burden. But did you ever think maybe God wanted you to be? We’ll get back to that in a couple weeks, but for now think of that concept of death with dignity. Would you like to have some say in making sure you don’t have to suffer too long? None of us wants to be a vegetable, just lying on that bed, do we? We want death with dignity.

Here’s a scary thought. That concept of “death with dignity” is the thought used to excuse hundreds of murders through legalized assisted suicide. At least that is how many have been reported. The “Death with Dignity” movement is also responsible for almost one in ten of all deaths in the Netherlands, where it has been legalized and practiced for some time. Right now, physician-assisted suicide has become legal in some U.S. states, and many other states have considered legalizing it. A simple majority in a state legislature would allow physicians the right to prescribe death.

It’s the latest thing – people taking their own life, and calling it good. Have you heard of it? Terms like mercy killing, euthanasia (which literally means “good death”), physician assisted suicide – they are all becoming more commonly accepted. Of course, God has another term for each of those things: murder...sin.

You see, that thing called life is not something we have the right to take. That’s what today’s text tells us. As we study this text from Deuteronomy, God reminds us, each of us, that **My Life is the LORD’s**. Our text is Deuteronomy 32:39. The LORD speaks: **“See now that I myself am He! There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand.”** This is

God's Word

For the next three weeks we'll be talking about how we view our life, specifically when it comes to thinking about death. And I know, we just don't like thinking about death, but it is one of the most certain facts of life. And the way we handle our own death or the death of a loved one affects so intensely our own lives and the lives of those we care about. In fact, it could even affect those lives for all eternity. So thinking about our death and understanding that my life is the LORD's, that is vital. God reminds us of that today. And he shows that really, it comes down to being a First Commandment issue.

I know, your first thought when I used the word "murder" was probably that we were talking Fifth Commandment stuff here. And that is involved, but, even before this ever gets to the taking of a life, it starts – and ends – with a refusal to accept God as God, in other words, making something else our god.

That's something that the context of our text highlights so well. You see, in Deuteronomy, we see Moses saying goodbye to the people he had been leading so faithfully for 40 years. He was now 120 and handing the baton, the leader's staff, to one of the two oldest remaining men in the nation – Joshua. Having ordered Joshua to "**Be strong and courageous**" (Deuteronomy 31:7), he now recites a song to the people of Israel, reminding them of God's greatness and mercy for them and their regular rebellion. He sings of God's provision and his help in battle, and also of their punishment that would come at the hands of their enemies. In fact, much of the song is in the negative because God had done all these things for them (making, redeeming, blessing them) and *they* had forgotten him. But now, as the song concludes, in our text, we have this beautiful reminder of who it was that was still with them and still in control, and would rescue them from their enemies.

Look at the words there. God is totally asserting himself as the one in control of life, death and everything else. And we say "Amen" to that, don't we? "Yes, God is in control." Right?

Do I need to remind you of that thing called worry, which is really us forgetting that God is in control? Do I need to remind you of those thoughts that sprang up in my mind as we talk about what we began with today? Sure, it would be nice to have control over how I leave this world, or at least we want a say in how our loved ones go.

You see, with all the medical advances God has given us as blessings today, it gets to feeling more and more that we *are* in control. We *do* have some say. And maybe we won't go so far as to do something illegal like asking someone to help put us out of our misery – but there are questions that come up in crisis situations that tempt us to try to play God, especially if we haven't thought through them before.

In Bible Study today, we addressed (will address) some of those questions. We spoke (will speak) about feeding tubes. When the doctors tell us that it doesn't look like our loved one will be getting any better – why not do what we can to usher them home? That question is too easy to consider when we are in the middle of the grief of that news. But unless their body is rejecting that nourishment from the feeding tube, what removing the tube is really

doing is starving them to death, because we don't figure their life is worth living anymore. No one would suggest not feeding a baby who can't feed herself yet because it is a bit of a nuisance. Why would we think about it at the other end of life, unless we're thinking we can decide which lives are worth living?

When God speaks about this life he's given us, he doesn't tell us to try to measure its quality and then make a decision on whether or not we should let it continue. He tells us to think of its sanctity – the fact that it is a gift from him and special to him.

And when our thoughts start becoming selfish – thinking of what we would or wouldn't enjoy going through, thinking of what we can bear to watch someone we care about go through, thinking of what we want to happen – we've given up letting God be God. We've broken the First Commandment, the foundation of them all. We've put ourselves and our feelings above him. We've forgotten His word for us today, **“There is no god besides me.”** And that leads to problems, now and forever.

So let's let God's Word remind us today – **My life is the LORD's.** And not only is that a First Commandment issue, it's also a common sense issue. After all, look at what he says in our text, **“I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal.”**

Think about that. He gave us life in the first place from the time He said in Eden, “Let us make man in our own image,” to the time He gave the miracle of life to those cells swimming around in your mother's womb, to the time He let your parents experience the miracle of childbirth. He made us.

And death is His to control too. I know, we like to pretend we have some control, but we've all found out plenty of times that there is no controlling it. Maybe you realized that when you were rescued from an untimely death or when a loved one wasn't. The One who knows all and has our best interests always in mind is the One with power over death and he knows when the perfect time is for each of us.

He even takes credit for being the One who “wounded.” He controlled the other nations defeating Israel for His people's good. And he allows us to go through troubles too, for our good. But notice that he tacks on there that His is the power to heal too and he will do it. The LORD is the One who promised the Israelites victory over their enemies, and he has promised us victory over the things that we can't control.

Jeremiah reminds us of that in Lamentations 3: ³⁷ **Who can speak and have it happen if the Lord has not decreed it?** ³⁸ **Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamities and good things come?** So it's only common sense. My life is the LORD's.

And that is a good thing, precisely because of that last phrase we looked at. **“I will heal,”** the LORD says. Since God is in control, he'll never let our life or death get out of control. That's His promise. In our second reading today we heard that promise. **“God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”**

And that is exactly what He has done. For all of our sins of placing our wants and our thoughts above God, He did heal. The word that God inspired Moses to use in our text for healing is the same one He had His last Old Testament writer use. Remember how Malachi promised that the Son of Man would rise with healing in His wings and as a result we would be leaping like calves released from a stall? That's what has happened.

Jesus did come to heal. He took on a death that had absolutely nothing of dignity in it. Death never does, because it is the result of sin. But Jesus removed that sin from our death by suffering for it all in His. He was stripped of all honor, as lots were cast for His clothing. He was whipped and beaten and abused allowing those sinners to direct where he went, and bystanders to hurl insults. Jesus went through the disgrace of death to give us actual dignity. He gave us the dignity that comes with our names as God's children. He gave us the dignity of an invitation to this feast of His body and blood for forgiveness – the foretaste of the real banquet we have waiting in heaven. He has won for us an eternity of honor and respect and perfection. Yes, it makes sense for us to rejoice that my life is the LORD's. Now let's remember that as we face all those decisions we'll be talking about in Bible class the next two weeks.

And rather than looking to try to take control and design our own deaths with *dignity*, let's celebrate the actual dignity that is ours as we read the last words of our text. “**No one can snatch them out of my hand.**” That's God talking. So we can say it: My life is the LORD's.

In Christ,
Amen.