**Jonah 3:1-10** Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, **2** “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.” **3** So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days’ journey in breadth. **4** Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s journey. And he called out, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” **5**  And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them. **10** When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

**Mark 1:14-20** Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, **15** and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” **16**  Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. **17** And Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” **18** And immediately they left their nets and followed him. **19** And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. **20** And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.

**1 Corinthians 7:29-35** This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, **30** and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, **31** and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away. **32** I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. **33** But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, **34** and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband. **35** I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.

**“Freed To Follow”**

“To those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ…Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 1:2-3). Amen. Sanctity of Human Life Sunday falls in the month of January. There are many sad government policies and dreadful choices that continue to abuse, violate, and even devalue life. However, one positive change for this new year of 2018 is the announcement of a new civil rights division within the Health and Human Services Department. It happened because as one article noted, “resurgence of religious liberty advocates within the federal government represents its latest effort to elevate “conscience protections” within the health care realm.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Not only are we to speak up for the life of those that cannot speak for themselves. Plenty of doctors, nurses, and others face attack from cherishing the value of life as God has made it. Now the common ground we share with others in this world is the natural way life comes to us, which is through a man and a woman. Yet, the Epiphany season reveals the fact Christians go even further with valuing life. Since the Son of God has become man, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. Natural life has received greater honor with God in the flesh for us men and our salvation. Jesus has come to lift us up to follow Him alone because He brings eternal life.

1. **Now time is not in our hands with whatever we have in life.**
2. In terms of the Law, the clock is ticking down.

* The Corinthian Christians were caught up in a Roman society, which meant eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die.
* This carelessness over life lead to a slew of ethical issues St. Paul had to address one of the biggest being marriage.
* However, for all the good order to have for life the Christian had to keep one eye on eternal treasures that always remain.
* St. James sums it up, “What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes” (James 4:14).

1. In terms of the Gospel, eternal life is what finally intrudes upon time.

* St. Paul tells us, “The appointed time has grown very short” or again, “The present form of this world is passing away.”
* Rather than the clock ticking down to death, the focus of St. Paul turns every part of our life to be fixed upon Jesus as Savior and Lord.
* His eternal Word breaks into life and declares, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”
* We proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes, because His cross has unleashed what this life can never give for it rests purely by faith in Jesus.

1. **Jesus lifts us up out of time by His everlasting invitation to life.**
2. There is a natural way in this world that is a blessing.

* The first miracle of Christ was at a wedding in Cana, so marriage is something to celebrate between a man and a woman all their days.
* When there was mourning over the death of Lazarus Jesus wept just as when there was rejoicing with children Jesus said, “Let them come to me.”
* Of course, spending money is part of life so whether it was paying taxes to Caesar or eating with a tax collector Jesus did.
* Having to use the world is why God gave it, so Jesus was not hesitant to grant a miraculous catch of fish or even feed 5,000 people.

1. Yet, the natural way has its own problems for sinners in this world world so there is a better way.

* Since time is short, “let those who have wives live as though they had none…” Family life is vital, but there is a greater promise for Jesus to dwell in our homes.
* Since time is short let, “those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing” Emotions are part of life, yet Christ promises hope against the despairs we face and His joyful presence will not fade.
* Since time is short let, “those who buy as though they had no goods.” Daily bread is necessary, but Jesus called His disciples and now us to greater riches of forgiveness that money cannot buy or keep.
* Since time is short let, “those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it.” Our age today offers much, only it is not worth changing the value of life or how God saves any in Christ.

1. **Jesus lifts us up to follow Him alone, since He is the center of life.**
2. Plenty of things pull and press upon life at the present making it hard to follow our Lord.

* Those in the Church at Corinth had busy lives and plenty of people and things were determined to gain their attention.
* St. Paul was not against families and duties in life, but they do bring anxieties with them that are a kind of captivity.
* Concerns and demands upon life quickly block out Christ’s love and commitment to us as it did with Martha distracted by her many things.
* Whatever our callings in life or circumstances, none of it is worth silencing the better peace Christ and His Word bring as it did for Mary.

1. If life reveals anything, Jesus must go before us all our days.

* The Lord who called those first disciples did not abandon them and that same dedicated love prevails over our lives by baptism.
* Anxious saints can receive the forgiveness Jesus gladly speak as freedom from our captivity to works and worry over life.
* Since nothing is permanent in this world, Christ lets us eat and drink from the permanence of His kingdom built upon His sacrifice.
* Time is short, but it does not necessarily mean we are losing because eternal life is what Christ brings for any who believe in Him.

Unlike so often today, St. Paul refuses to drive a wedge between upholding good order designed by God for life and undivided devotion to the Lord. We can value the sanctity of life, but also how Christ by His cross has profoundly changed life. Time yields to Him for He will bring a new heavens and earth that will surpass what is passing away. Jesus has come to lift us up to follow Him alone because He brings eternal life. Amen. Now the peace of Christ that passes all understanding be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.

1. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/to-your-health/wp/2018/01/18/new-hhs-civil-rights-division-charged-with-protecting-health-workers-with-moral-objections/?tid=ss\_fb&utm\_term=.2234725e7dda [↑](#footnote-ref-1)