

The image features a woman in a bikini holding a large white cup, set against a background of a sunset or sunrise with a silhouette of a person's head. The scene is bathed in warm, golden light. The woman is positioned on the left, holding the cup with both hands. The silhouette of a person's head is on the right, facing left. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

# THE GOSPEL AND ABORTION

*How Jesus helps us approach questions of vulnerability and new life.*

## ABORTION AND THE GOSPEL OF JESUS

Vulnerability can be frightening. Pregnancy certainly involves vulnerable people. The mother, the father, perhaps the siblings, family and friends, all find themselves in some way stretched to make room for this new, wondrous but utterly dependent and demanding person. The vulnerability of pregnancy is magnified, though, when the pregnancy is unplanned, unwanted or the baby shows signs of major disability.

For many women, it can be terribly difficult to see such a pregnancy positively. It means reorientating to a very different future to the one expected, and it is often a future devoid of the things valued and hoped for. She may face losing relationships, freedom, security, career, opportunities or youth. She certainly loses some control over her life. She may fear that she will be pushed to the sidelines of life and even lose a sense of her own worth. Or she may simply feel that a baby at this time will just be too much for her or for others. A father may feel similarly as might grandparents and others close to the pregnancy. It may even feel as though the survival of one demands the life of another.

For some women, having an abortion is the last thing they want to do but they feel enormous pressure from others or from their life circumstances to have an abortion. Others chose to have an abortion readily without realising the burden of grief and guilt they will carry afterwards.

In the gospels, Jesus sought out those who were vulnerable, isolated, struggling, and who carried heavy burdens of guilt. Indeed, he had little time for self-righteous people who smugly displayed their seemingly 'successful' lives and looked down on others. As the Son of God he could instantly see the truth about people's hearts – truth which they often failed to see or admit. His words to everyone he met were authoritative, deeply confronting, compassionate and liberating.

Jesus also knows the truth about our hearts. His words to every one of us are also both radically challenging and deeply freeing, and they speak directly to everyone who is rendered vulnerable by an unplanned or complicated pregnancy, or by a past abortion.

Here are three particularly important points Jesus made:

Firstly, many people know Jesus' story about the Good Samaritan (Luke 10v25-37), who had no qualms about stopping to care for a complete stranger lying hurt (and vulnerable!) by the road after others had hurried past. Jesus told this story to a lawyer who, upon being told by Jesus to love his neighbour, asked 'And who is my neighbour?' You certainly get the feeling that the lawyer wanted to draw some limits about who he was obliged to love!

In his ensuing story about the Good Samaritan, Jesus shows that love does not stop to ask whether someone is worthy of my love. Love assumes that God gives value and worth to all people because he made every person to belong to him. Personal value is not found in success, youth, freedom, ability or acceptance by others. Security cannot ultimately be found in savings, jobs, education, birth control or even in particular relationships. We can be considered ordinary, unproductive and unimportant but nothing will shift the value God gives to us just because he made us.

Secondly, Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan was designed to make the lawyer feel very uncomfortable. And it is designed to make us feel very uncomfortable too. For we must admit that have failed to love others on countless occasions. Much worse, we fail to love and listen to the God who made us and owns us - and

who owns the people we have failed. Jesus pulled no punches about the dreadful seriousness of our continuing ignorance of and rebellion against God. According to Jesus, we deserve only his judgement (John 3v18-20, John 16v7-11).

But thirdly, Jesus came precisely in order to show compassion and to bring hope to failures and rebels like us. After telling this story, Jesus continued on a long but determined journey towards a humiliating death on the cross. In his death, he voluntarily paid the price for our rebellion and lifted away our entire burden of guilt, including the guilt of abortion. He did this because of our deep worth to God and his unflinching love for us. Jesus famously said:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3v16).

Jesus calls on us to start life over again, finding our value, security and hope in his unconditional love for us shown by his death on the cross. Then, with his help, he calls us to start changing into people who love God and unconditionally love others.

For a mother, father, family and community under the strain of an unplanned or complicated pregnancy, this means, first of all, deciding to embrace the dependant and vulnerable 'stranger' in the womb. A foetus, just like each of us, is valuable and worthy of love simply because he or she has been made by God, no matter how much that love will demand of us. Indeed, we were all foetuses once, known and treasured by God before we knew anyone else (Psalm 139v13-16).

The love of God in Jesus also frees us from the need to create our own value and security. Instead, as those who love and are loved by Jesus, we should strive to create Christian communities that leave no one in isolation; that thoughtfully and generously support vulnerable people who find themselves in radically changed circumstances; that value children; that honour parenthood highly; and that embrace those with disabilities, no matter how short and difficult their earthly lives. God, in his power, is able to work for good in the lives of all those who love him, no matter how dire the circumstances.

If you would like to know more about Jesus try reading the gospel of Mark or Paul's letter to the Colossians in the New Testament.

If you would like to talk to someone about any of these ideas feel free to contact the Gospel In Society Team at the Presbyterian Church of Queensland.

### **References:**

Andrew Cameron, *Joined Up Life*, IVP England 2011  
Oliver O'Donovan, *Begotten Not Made*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1984  
Allen Verhey, *Reading the Bible in the Strange World of Medicine*, Eerdmans USA 2003