

Body autonomy and community care :: Reproductive rights June 12, 2022

There's a social media trend I've noticed recently, "Point of View." It's a joke or a video shared from a specific vantage point, usually starting with "POV"

POV: it's Saturday night 11:30 pm and you're still writing the sermon. I'm in the Shadow Rock pulpit about twice a year, so I'm not sure that I have a "regular" sermon style. But if I do - this is NOT IT. So buckle up.

First as I start, I need to share with you that - while there's no easy peasy time to be in ministry - it's particularly difficult right now. Every faith leader, every activist, every community organizer, every justice worker is struggling with burn out. Before the pandemic, there was the steady drip of increasing oppression and the continual erosion of our values and our sense of community. The pandemic and the renewed and energized fight for racial justice in 2020 added heavy weights and increased awareness of the weights that others have carried and continue to carry. And all of this - all of this! - taking place in a culture that's frankly uninterested in church engagement. So we're tired - your pastor and your staff - we're tired.

For me personally, the gap between the joy I experience in my family (despite our fair share of problems) and the sense of hopelessness about the future that sneaks up on me has never been greater. What message could I possibly have for you?

We have this beautiful poetic commentary on Psalm 139 from Rev Tracy Howe. What's left to say?

Monday May 2, I got an email from Ken, asking for resources to talk about the leaked supreme Court decision to ban abortion. I was cooking dinner and hadn't heard about the leaked brief. I quickly sent a book recommendation and began gathering links* and resources.

The next week, I told my daughter when it would be really important to delete the period tracking application on her phone.

The following week, we attended a demonstration for reproductive freedom.

And all this time, I've been recalling my pregnancies, my reproductive health history, my experiences with sexuality, gender, and parenthood.

And here's what I want to share with you today:

1. I want Shadow Rock to be a safe place for people to be brave.
2. Abortion is an important word.
3. "Choice" is important but we must go further.
4. Abortion care is not a women's issue.

I want Shadow Rock to be a safe place for people to be brave.

I know we are small, aging, and tired. But there is still work for us to do together, beloveds. When we stand up, stand together, we give hope and encouragement to the world. WE ARE STILL HERE.

Abortion is an important word. Our squeamishness - the way we hide behind slogans - hurts people and is inherently anti-body. It's body hatred, body terrorism.

We need to say it: abortion. Say it with me now: abortion. We have to be willing to talk about difficult things. We must. Even uncomfy things like bodies, pregnancy, uteruses, blood.

When we are apologetic about supporting reproductive rights -
When we use "pro-choice" language exclusively -
When we pretend that this issue doesn't touch us or only affects us as far as we think about our daughters and granddaughters -

We increase the shame of people who experience unplanned pregnancies and who need abortion care.

We can be proud and stand strong in our convictions around body autonomy and the agency of all people with female reproductive systems. Body autonomy and body acceptance and THE COMMANDMENT TO LOVE OUR NEIGHBOR are all linked together.

Many of you have heard me say before: 'when we say God loves everybody, we mean God loves Every Body.' Why would we be ashamed or think that talking about human bodies is somehow inappropriate?

Abortion is an important word. We need to get used to saying it.

#3 "Choice" is important but we must go further.

This might be new territory for you. Let's talk this through together. Most of our discussions around abortion use the rhetoric of choice. And that's not a bad thing, but it does have some repercussions when we don't say more.

When we emphasize "choice" and the language of individual liberty, we leave the question of access to others AND we cede the moral argument. Let me say this again with different words. When we talk only about choice - the "you can't tell me what to do" tactic - we

- Never get around to talking about access. With so many US counties having no abortion providers, our 'choice' ends up being pretty meaningless.
- Start down a path of individualism and consumerist language that isn't helpful.

- Deny the reality of the way people really live. Pregnant people aren't Lone Rangers! None of us are! Every decision we make affects others.

We need to EXPAND AND DEEPEN our approaches to reproductive rights to include
COMMUNITY
COMPASSION
AND CARE

This shift - to community context, acknowledges the reality that we are in solidarity with pregnant people - and it may become of paramount importance in the coming months.

Finally, #4 - Abortion care is not a women's issue. It's not just women who need abortion care. With attacks on our trans siblings increasing, the way we talk about this issue matters.

Compassionate language calls forth the best in us. We need to think differently, speak differently about sexuality and gender.

Trans men and nonbinary/agender/genderfluid people need abortion care.
When we frame abortion as a women's issue or talk about it in terms of what we want for our daughters and granddaughter, we reinforce gender binaries that cause harm.

Human Rights Campaign has reported over 300 anti LGBTQ bills in state legislatures in 2022, with 140 of them specifically targeting trans people, especially trans youth. (reference here: <https://www.hrc.org/resources/unprecedented-onslaught-of-state-legislation-targeting-transgender-american>)

So let me be plain friends: I DON'T CARE IF ITS DIFFICULT AND AWKWARD to say "pregnant people" or "people who are experiencing an unplanned pregnancy" or even "people with uteruses" instead of just saying women. Our values of inclusion and justice demand that we take better care with our words.

Thanks for listening so far. I appreciate it. I'll link to this sermon (with some references and links) in this week's Rock the Week. I welcome your questions and comments always.

Lois has a phrase she uses often: "the bottom line is." I like it.

The bottom line is: When we really sit with our compassion for a person experiencing an unwanted pregnancy, we want what they want: what's best for them.

So let's do it right now. Let's practice sitting this morning with our compassion. Please think of a person you love, a person you're neutral about, and a person you have beef with. Hold their names in your mind please or jot them on your bulletin.

Let's sit in compassion:

May I feel protected and safe.

May I feel contented and pleased.

May my body surround me with strength.

May my life unfold smoothly.

May my light shine unobstructed.

Now for the person you love:

Now for the person you are neutral about:

Now for the person you have beef with:

- When we have a practice of sitting in compassion for ourselves and for others, I have faith that our path, the action we need to take, will become more clear. I pray that I am right.

Amen.

*links re. reproductive justice - some of these are specifically for people of faith:

<https://rcrc.org/protestant/> some scripture references here - RCRC is the primary voice for pro-choice people of faith

a lot of good language in this statement: <https://rcrc.org/unitarian-universalist/>

<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2008/09/30/pro-choice-does-not-mean-pro-abortion-an-argument-for-abortion-rights-featuring-the-rev-carlton-veazey/>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2022/02/05/abortion-rights-jews-orthodox-catholic-pro-life-prochoice/>

<https://everydayfeminism.com/2013/11/when-abortion-is-cultural-taboo/>

<https://everydayfeminism.com/2015/07/what-abortion-decline-reveals/>

centering the experiences of people who've experienced abortion:

<https://www.healthline.com/health-news/study-finds-99-of-women-say-they-do-not-regret-having-an-abortion>

using words other than choice:

https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2022/05/abortion-activism-pro-choice-messaging-language-ireland-argentina.html?via=rss_socialflow_facebook&fbclid=IwAR0ksMGjuprWwg96O_obUrWog3xDwoEYnO3jDRTF6GFn1kq9eJa0NRF-iEs

