

The Third Sunday after Epiphany  
The Rev. Anne C. Fowler

*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;  
those who lived in a land of deep darkness--on them light has shined.*

Isaiah 9:1

It's the weekend to commemorate the 1973 Roe Wade decision, of blessed memory. I told a friend that I'd be here today with my hair on fire, but I come instead with a message of both sorrow and hope.

A number of years ago, at my parish in Jamaica Plain, a young couple showed up for the first time on Sunday morning. They were tearful and troubled, and after the service they asked if they could speak to me. I was about to catch a flight to D.C. for a meeting of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, but I said I had a few minutes.

Ironically, or perhaps providentially, their first question was about the Episcopal Church's position on abortion. I said that we were formally pro-choice. Then they told their story.

Maggie was five months pregnant, and she'd had a bad fall on the ice the week before. Concerned, she'd gone to her doctor, who told her that her baby had a severe fetal abnormality and would die in her womb before he was born. Her in-laws, staunch Roman Catholics, had told her she had killed the baby by falling down. What should they do?

I said, "you have to decide which of your choices is less unbearable." You can carry the baby to term and have a stillbirth. Or you can go to Wichita Kansas, where Dr. George Tiller will take good care of you." Dr. Tiller was one of the few physicians in the country willing to perform late term abortions." They thanked me and went on their way.

They returned a couple of weeks later. They said that Dr. Tiller and his staff had taken wonderful care of them and they were relieved and grateful for the decision they'd taken. They became faithful parishioners. In the spring they planted a tree in their yard and we had a service of mourning and celebrating the memory of their son.

Several years later I was again in D.C. for a Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice when word came that Dr. Tiller had been murdered by an anti-abortion extremist. Dr. Tiller was killed during a Sunday morning service at his church, Reformation Lutheran Church, where he was serving as an usher.

My friend the Dean of the Cathedral in Boston called to say that he was planning a vigil to commemorate Dr. Tiller that evening, and could I speak? I couldn't get back from D.D. in time, but I told him about Maggie and said I would call her. I did call her and asked if she would speak, and she said she was too shy to do that but would write out her thoughts for the Dean to read. Apparently her words were strong and potent.

Around that time Maggie was diagnosed with cancer and spent a year battling that. She won! And then she got pregnant again and gave birth to a baby girl Eloise, whom we baptized at St. John's. And then Maggie finished her doctorate in biomedical *something* and the family moved to California for her job. I get a Christmas card every year from the family, who now includes a healthy little brother for Eloise.

Governor Mills has unveiled 4 new bills to protect and advance abortion rights and access in Maine. One would make abortion legally accessible at any time during pregnancy with the approval of a qualified medical professional.

The others are: a bill to prevent municipalities from preempting state abortion laws, a bill to eliminate health insurance co-payments for abortion care, and a bill to strengthen protections for healthcare providers offering abortion care to people traveling to Maine from states where abortion is no longer legal. You may have read of Dana Peirce, whose story parallels that of my friend Maggie's, and who, when we first talked to her at Planned Parenthood, was at first a bit hesitant to speak publicly. Clearly, she too has become emboldened, (though I'm not sure how the pig-tailed look fits in.)

Predictably, the anti-choice folks have gone mental. The head of the Christian Civic League says that the realities described in the bills "do not represent his realities." Of course they don't, Buster, you are white male, and I expect, beyond childbearing age.

Roman Catholic Bishop Deeley says that these bills calling them *an evil and radical attempt to normalize a horrific stance that every life is not sacred*. The Press Herald has blocked any comments to this story. I wonder why?

But, but ... I read in the Press Herald on Friday that

- " More than a dozen faith leaders filed suit Thursday in St. Louis Circuit Court to overturn Missouri's abortion ban, arguing state legislators acted based on their personal religious beliefs and violated the separation of church and state protected in Missouri's Constitution. The faith leaders, from St. Louis, Kansas City and Columbia, represent several Protestant and Jewish denominations. They partnered with the National Women's Law Center and Americans United for Separation of Church and State in drafting the suit.
- The 13 religious leaders filing the suit argue that their faith calls them to ensure abortion access because of how it affects a pregnant person's autonomy, health, economic security and equality.

- Among them are the Rev. Deon K. Johnson, the first openly gay Black bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Missouri. He follows the opinion of the Episcopal Church that the decision to have an abortion is personal one and “an integral part of a woman’s struggle to assert her dignity and worth as a human being.”

My friend and college classmate and Supreme Court watcher, Linda Greenhouse, had this to say in the NYTimes on Thursday. *The Dobbs decision and its aftermath have freed people to acknowledge — or even shocked them into realizing — that a civilized country requires access to abortion. It is possible, and I’ll even be bold enough to say that it is probable, that in Roe v. Wade’s constitutional death lies the political resurrection of the right to abortion.*

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Alleluia, Alleluia! Amen*