

This week, our country learned that the Supreme Court is likely to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, and the protection that pregnant people have had in this country to get reproductive health care, including an abortion since 1972. And so, the internet has been full of stories of people who needed abortions or chose abortions. And I have never had to make that choice. But I have received reproductive health care, as have all of us. All of us were tended to when we were born, even if we have not needed reproductive health care since. And so, I want to tell you my small story. I have two wonderful children, who my husband and I love dearly. And before our oldest son Ben was born, before I was pregnant with him, we were trying to get pregnant and have a child, and we were so excited when that happened. And we went to the doctor and saw the heartbeat of this long-awaited pregnancy. And then we were devastated when the embryo stopped growing. And, when a subsequent trip to the doctor's office showed that the heartbeat had stopped, I cried. I hadn't told anybody except my mother that we thought we were pregnant. And I waited to have the miscarriage that my doctor told me was coming. But it didn't happen. Miscarriage is incredibly common. Perhaps 1/3 of all pregnancies naturally end in miscarriage. And in some of those cases, the woman's body just simply doesn't expel the embryo, even though no growth is happening, and the pregnancy is not going to continue. We waited another three weeks. And then my doctor said, "what we need to do for your own health and wellbeing is to remove the tissue that's inside the uterus. We're going to help your body have a miscarriage. You are very likely to be able to go on and get pregnant again" and joyfully that had been what I wanted, and what my experience was. That was a hard and painful day, physically and emotionally. I didn't want it to be happening. I felt like I had failed. But I was so grateful that this was a simple and everyday procedure to go to my doctor's office and have a non-viable pregnancy ended.

I want to invite you into that space with me, that space of vulnerability. We need that common universal experience of needing reproductive health care. I want to invite you into that space where so many people find themselves every day, needing or wanting an abortion as part of that health care and I ask you to stay with me in this space for a little while.

This is the kind of ordinary health care that was not easily accessible before *Roe v. Wade* guaranteed the right to an abortion in 1972. There are so many reasons that a woman might need an abortion or might choose to have a miscarriage: A woman with an ectopic pregnancy, which, if left untreated will always end in the woman's death, and for which the only treatment is abortion. A woman pregnant because of

rape or incest. A girl who is too young to become a mother. A woman with children already who can't afford another child or can't risk the health consequences of pregnancy. A woman who is too old to have another baby but finds herself pregnant. A woman who just doesn't want to be pregnant. It seems quite likely now that the Supreme Court of the United States will end the legal protections that allow women in these harrowing circumstances to seek abortions.

The legal details are complex. The New York Times reports that 15 states are set to ban abortion entirely if Roe is overturned, either immediately or within a few months. In these states, exceptions would only be made for medical emergencies where the woman's life is in danger. And one of these states is Texas, whose new law had delegated to ordinary citizens the ability to sue somebody who they think is getting an abortion. And that is an incredibly complex and muddy legal situation.

Five justices, four of them men, appointed by presidents who lost the popular vote, will control the rights of over 30 million people and their health care in America. It's the first time since the post reconstruction era that this kind of rights, for so many people, has been rolled back in our country. So, it is time for us as moral people, committed to human rights, to think about who we mean when we say "we". When we consider whose lives matter - who has rights, who is part of our community, who is on our team, who do we mean, who is included in being human? And I'm going to ask that we stretch our hearts wide and think about including as many people as we can. When America was founded, our cherished documents of liberty were drafted to include only white men, who owned land, as truly fully human members of the Commonwealth, and some often had to be Christian as well to vote. These were the people with the franchise. These were the people who got to make all of the decisions for everybody else. Everybody else included white women, included poor white men who didn't own property, African Americans, many of whom were enslaved, American Indians also sometimes enslaved, divorced from their land. And then, when they arrived, Mexican Americans and Asian Americans who were late to be offered citizenship and could not always trust its promises when it was granted. The American Revolution, flawed as it was, ignited a spark that has grown into a blaze of human rights worldwide. Democracies around the world have declared that more and more lives matter and more and more people count as human. In our country, white men without property were given the vote in the early 19th century. We fought a civil war to end the enslavement of African Americans and passed the 15th Amendment to the Constitution which ensured voting rights for people of all races.

That work wasn't done, though. In the civil rights work for African Americans, which through blood, sweat and tears shored up that amendment, with the Civil Rights Act, and the Voting Rights Act. Still, today, we must say that black lives matter and that racism is a scourge we are still fighting in our country. That women's lives matter was affirmed with the right to vote in 1919. But it was not until the 70s that a woman could open a line of credit in her own name, avoid being fired because she was pregnant, serve on a jury, and legally object to sexual harassment at work. Gay, lesbian, and bisexual lives have been affirmed from Stonewall to Obergefell confirmed as fully human. We still fight for those lives today and we fight for trans lives: people who are still remarkably at risk. And I want to say here that although, when I talk about abortion and pregnancy, I am mostly talking about women. Not every person who is pregnant identifies as a woman. Part of what we mean when we ask for full health care for all people is gender. Affirming health care that meets people where they are. And our values call us even beyond human lives. I had planned a sermon about endangered species this morning - and you may get hear that sermon later this month. But where I was going to go with that, and thinking about our team's story this morning, and who is on our team, is that our values call us to be on the team of those who have no voice; including animals, including people who are disenfranchised and need more support than they get from the official systems.

Rights do not emerge only out of the interests of the individual and their need for life, but out of society and its need to flourish. We, all of us as a society, have an interest in the wellbeing and prosperity of more people. Because when more people can exercise their full humanity, more **good** results. We don't want art only made by one group of people. We want art made by as many people as possible. We want as many minds as possible coming up with scientific discoveries and breakthroughs. We want as many perspectives as we can get, as much empathy and understanding we can get from cross-cultures and understanding one another. We want the inventions that come from everyone's mind. We want the new business ideas. We want the new possibilities that come from having as many people as possible be full participating members of our community.

As trans rights and women's rights and gay rights come under attack in the public square, we see companies stepping up to help protect those rights for their workers. And that is because companies recognize the value of having as many people as possible supported and able to work for the company's mission. And it's not just rights that are at stake. It's not just people who find themselves working for a big company that can look out for them. It is human lives at stake, with the possibility of ending the right to an abortion. Especially the lives of poor, disenfranchised

women, more likely to be immigrants, more likely to be people of color. People will die carrying pregnancies that their bodies can't support. Babies will die in the process of being born. Children will suffer and die because they are born to families that cannot care for them, or because their mothers don't survive an unwise pregnancy. Trans people will die, unable to get the reproductive care that they need.

I heard a story this week of a little boy remembering his own mother's terrible miscarriage. Before his mother was miscarrying, his father took her to the hospital. She began to bleed and bleed, and it wouldn't stop, and she was receiving transfusions while the father took the children, their living children, to the hospital board to say, "look, this woman is supporting these children and if you don't end this pregnancy, these children will be harmed by it." And the board had to vote on whether or not this woman, with these children and this husband, deserved the care of an abortion - think of all those lives: the life of the mother, the life of her living children, the life of her family. These values are pro-life. They are in support of all of these lives. Life and diversity and human flourishing are our values.

So, if Roe v Wade is overturned, what can we do? I ground my feminism in a trust in women to know what is best for them and their bodies. Here in this church, we offer Our Whole Lives comprehensive sexuality education, so that we make sure that our kids, throughout the all the ages of their childhood, in age appropriate ways, understand how reproduction works; how to enter into healthy and loving relationships, how they can use birth control, so that they don't have a pregnancy that they don't want; and what their options are in terms of reproductive health care. Supporting that program is something that we can do. We can give to organizations that support our values. We can be prepared to help people who are seeking reproductive health care from out of state. We can take more risks than seem necessary; more risks than we think we have to, to preserve access to reproductive care, including abortion here in Massachusetts, and not think of ourselves as safe because we live in New England. It is possible, without the protection of Roe versus Wade, that the Congress could pass a nationwide abortion ban. And I hope that I myself would be prepared to help people get the care they need. Even if it is illegal.

I remember what it felt like to be in my doctor's office. So sad to be losing a pregnancy that I really wanted. And I remember how supported I was with unquestioned access to the care that I needed: health insurance, a loving partner, time to recover. This Mother's Day, my "mother's heart" is breaking for all the people who will not have that support and those choices. My heart breaks for all of

those people who will be denied basic bodily autonomy and be forced to carry pregnancies to term. People are not “things” to be done to by those in power. People are living beings with inherent worth and dignity, whose lives are their own. I invite you into their circle of care, holding them and fighting for them, loving them, and supporting them even as legal protections crumble. I love all of you. Amen.

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