



## From the Desk of Pastor Meyer

### **I Could Have Been A Statistic: A Reflection on Roe v. Wade**

January, 2018, marks the 44<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Roe v. Wade, the landmark Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion in the United States. In the four decades since then, it is estimated that over 50 million babies were not born due to elective abortion procedures.

Fifty million: it's hard to put that number into perspective and realize how huge a population that entails. According to [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov), the state of Texas has about 27 million citizens. That's only *half* of the number of children who were not allowed to live since 1973. Historians speak of the great burden of deaths suffered by Great Britain during World War I. I recall reading in one of John Keegan's books – probably The First World War – that he estimated that England lost roughly a third of her men of military age from 1914-1918 and what a great burden that placed on the nation's recovery post-war. Ernest Hemmingway popularized this as "The Lost Generation." Yet, during only a four-year period (2010-2014), studied by the World Health Organization in conjunction with the Guttmacher Institute, it was estimated that roughly 25% of pregnancies were terminated by abortion (see the full article at [http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(16\)30380-4/fulltext](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(16)30380-4/fulltext)).

Unfortunately, rather than mourning the loss of 25 percent of a generation, our culture lauds this act of genocide as "freedom," "choice," and "rights."

January will also mark my 44th birthday. I was born a year and a week after the Roe decision was rendered. Even as I remember my birthday – and give thanks to God for two faithful parents who had me baptized in the hospital at 2 days of age when doctors told them I probably would not survive because I couldn't keep food down and was losing weight rapidly – I also remember those who were not given the chance at life.

You see, I could have been part of a very sad statistic. I could have been that part of the lost generation after Roe v. Wade who did not live to be baptized. Let me explain.

One of the rationales offered by pro-choice groups is that children who are born with severe mental or physical handicaps will not have a high quality of life. Now, I realize that those terms are somewhat nebulous. "Severe" means different things to different folks. Doctors have metrics to determine how badly challenged a person must be before labeled "mildly," "moderately," or "severely" handicapped. Likewise, quality of life can be rather slippery. And there are degrees of being handicapped. But, at the risk of being

overly broad, because these are the terms one generally sees, I am going to use them here as well.

Thanks to modern medicine, parents can see on a sonogram a remarkably clear picture of their child in the mother's womb. In fact, parents can have a 3-D photo made of their baby in the womb, allowing them to see amazing details of their baby ever before getting to hold the little one. In 1974 such technological wonders didn't exist, at least not in rural Iowa where my parents lived. But, if this technology had existed then or was available, it would have shown a couple of strange things about my little body.

By definition, my body was physically handicapped. I say, "by definition," because I've never considered myself "handicapped." But, no matter what I say, the fact is that my body is malformed. I was born without toes on either foot. Look down at your shoes. See where the laces end? My feet don't make it that far. They look more like traumatically-amputated stumps than feet. Both of my hands are dwarfed. My left hand has full fingers, but my 13-year-old son now has longer fingers than I do. Where your middle knuckles allow your fingers to bend and flex, that is where the fingers on my right-hand stop. Although I can bend my right thumb, I cannot flex my right fingers at all. In the 70's there was a medication given to some mothers who suffered from morning sickness that caused such deformities, but my mom never took that. Likewise, there is sometimes a situation where an umbilical cord can wrap itself around a body part, effectively amputating it *in utero*. We do not believe this was the case with me, however, for two reasons: one, two distinct areas of my body were impacted (feet and hands); and, more significantly, my younger sister had dwarfism in both of her hands as well. My birth defects seem to be genetic – a flaw, if you will, in the genetic code that makes fingers and toes.

Let's say, for the sake of argument, that modern sonograms were available in 1974 and it showed my physical malformation. Further, and again for the sake of argument, let's say that Mom and Dad were counseled that my quality of life would be negatively impacted because of my problems. Depending on whether the doctor was a glass half full or a glass half empty guy, the conversation could have been as bad as this: "Your son is handicapped; he might not be able to walk or run; he might never be able to throw a ball or manipulate anything with his right hand. He will certainly be different than other children. Do you want your son growing up to be the one every other child stares at?" What if Mom and Dad agreed and decided to abort me? My family of 6, growing up, would have been a family of 5...well, perhaps 4 had they followed the same line of thinking for my sister when they discovered her situation.

I could have been one of the lost generation.

I thank God every day for a lot of things. I thank God that Mom and Dad chose to have a baby who was able to play baseball (throwing right handed!) and football (throwing left-handed); lettered in the high school marching band (making it to the state finals two years in a row); mowed acres of lawns; hauled thousands of bales of hay each summer; and walked home from school many afternoons. I've stood on beaches and mountains;

in forests and deserts. I've held hands with a beautiful woman who became my wife. With tears in my eyes, I prayed that my children would be "normal," and then I wept with joy when the sonograms showed all three of our children to have normal hands and feet, and I counted each precious finger and toe on their newborn feet multiple times to be sure we didn't miss something. I've fed my children and changed plenty of dirty diapers as a result. I'm a pretty good typist – I average around 80WPM with 95+% accuracy. I enjoy woodwork and have made all sorts of things, from benches to pens and all sizes in between. All these things were done because my parents weren't worried about my quality of life. They were simply thankful God had given them a child. The name Jonathan, incidentally, means "God gives."

Don't misunderstand me: I wouldn't wish my hands or feet on anyone. Without toes, the shock of walking and running was directly transferred to my hips and spine. I have three herniated lumbar discs and my knees and hips are starting to hurt most days. Although I wear a full-foot prosthetic, my gait is odd. Standing for long periods of time is uncomfortable. Buying shoes and gloves is a challenge – no one makes gloves with only inch-long fingers, so the finger-tips on the right glove flop uselessly. Over the years, plenty of people have given me "the look." At the swimming pool, people stare when I walk by. My nephew once quipped, "Uncle Jon – push your toes out!" While I've grown used to seeing a look of surprise when we shake hands for the first time, I'll never forget when my own toddler-aged brother bluntly asked – as only a young child could do – "What is *wrong* with you?"

But I thank God for my hands and my feet. I see them as they are: imperfect, but part of what makes me, me. I wanted to be a Marine, but the Marines couldn't take me because of my hands and feet. I tried the Army, the Navy and even the Air Force – no one would take me. Yet, the Lord had already taken me – hands, feet, and all my members and senses – and made me His. Called His child through Holy Baptism, He later called me into the Holy Ministry. As a pastor, I've stood next to newly-minted parents with their own baby, and I've sat next to parents, weeping, because their child died all-too-soon. My hands have poured baptismal water over a baby's head and poured sand upon the grave of the elderly who have died in the faith. I've made the sign of the cross in holy absolution and in blessing.

God has given me these feet and hands – malformed, though they may be – and, in Christ, even these have been redeemed. God doesn't see them as ugly. He sees them as beautiful, through Christ.

And one day, when Christ returns, they will be fully, completely, wholly and holy "resurrectedly" beautiful indeed.

Pastor Meyer