

How Did a Medical Procedure Become So Politicized? – Part 2

Last month's post explored the history surrounding the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*. Today we will continue some of those threads as we look at the many implications of overturning *Roe*. I know I am wading into a controversial issue and my hope is that you will wade in with me. I encourage you to think seriously about this issue and its implications. The many tentacles associated with banning this medical procedure may surprise and possibly alarm you.

To sum up the previous post, the issue of abortion was used to garner support for a conservative religious political movement based on racism in order to keep certain white people in power. The Bible is clear that racism, which is a form of oppression, is wrong. Jesus' commandments to love God and love people (Matthew 22:36-40*) compel us to seek to understand the implications of the politics and policies that impact us and our neighbors.

The impetus to ban abortions was based in racism. The implications, however, are both racist and misogynistic. Abortion is a medical procedure that impacts pregnant people and those who can become pregnant, including women, nonbinary people, and trans men. Banning this procedure strips away their right to have agency over their own bodies and gives that control to the government. No medical procedure that impacts men is banned; men continue to have agency over their own bodies.

Jesus elevated women despite the misogynistic and patriarchal practices of life during Bible times. He also socialized with the poor and the marginalized and portrayed them as humans who were valuable to Him. We'll take a look at how overturning *Roe v. Wade* impacts these groups.

It's important to understand that most abortions occur in the first trimester and most are medication abortions, rather than surgical abortions, meaning the pregnant person takes medication (mifepristone and misoprostol) to induce an abortion. According to the National Institutes of Health, the risk of death is 14 times higher in childbirth than in a legal induced abortion. This fact is often misrepresented so it's important to realize that abortion is actually safer than childbirth.

Experts believe that banning abortions will cause the overall maternal mortality rate to increase by 21%, with the rate for white women increasing 13% and the rate for Black women increasing by a disproportionate 33%. Current maternal mortality rates for Black women are already three times that of white women.

Restricting abortion ignores the pregnant person's individual circumstances and the reasons they may seek an abortion. Most people who have abortions are poor women who already have children. Since the average cost of raising a child in the US is \$233,610, banning abortions will cause poverty rates to rise as more people are forced to raise children they cannot afford. This will most likely impact conservative states more where the likelihood of abortion restrictions is

the greatest and where these same states are least likely to have programs in place that support the poor.

Conservative states are also likely to have more crisis pregnancy centers than abortion clinics. Crisis pregnancy centers are not licensed medical clinics and many use deceptive advertising and misleading information, including the lie that childbirth is safer than an abortion, to unduly influence and pressure a pregnant person to not abort. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists has stated that crisis pregnancy centers are dangerous because they pose as medical facilities but are not regulated by the laws that govern medical clinics. Backed by wealthy anti-abortion donors and some state legislatures, the proliferation of these centers will only increase. Texas, for example, has recently approved spending \$100 million of taxpayer money that will go to support crisis pregnancy centers in that state.

Banning abortions dismisses the nuances of pregnancy. One in one thousand pregnant people are diagnosed with cancer while pregnant. Cancer drugs are fatal to a fetus in the first trimester. Waiting until the second trimester to begin cancer treatments puts the mother's life at huge risk. Doctors are now having to navigate the uncharted waters of what constitutes a grave enough danger to the mother's life that warrants an abortion. Most abortion bans do not take into account the life of the mother.

The same is true in the case of difficult or life-threatening pregnancies, including the higher risks associated with in vitro fertilization. Having the option of abortion, even if it's not taken, lends a safety net to the mother's life. Some people will choose not to become pregnant at all if they believe their health could be at significant risk and abortion will not be an option.

Sometimes people in abusive relationships are forced to become pregnant by their abusers as a way to control them. Often this is accomplished by the abuser tampering with their contraception. There is evidence that suggests domestic violence sometimes starts when the partner becomes pregnant. Statistics show that pregnant women have a higher homicide rate than non-pregnant women. Homicide is one of the leading causes of death of pregnant women.

Restricting abortions is a slippery slope and the distance between banning abortions and criminalizing them is short. There are already "trigger laws" in some states that will criminalize the actions of the provider as a felony with jail time. Some of these laws also mandate jail time for the pregnant person. From there, it is a short slide from criminalizing abortion to accusing people of murder who miscarry, especially when the methods are similar. The procedure called dilation and curettage ("D&C") is sometimes used after a miscarriage; it can also be used in a surgical abortion. Likewise, the medication misoprostol is often used after a miscarriage and is one of the medications taken for a medication abortion. During the current vastly changing legal landscape, doctors in certain states are hesitant to help pregnant people who miscarry for fear of the legal consequences. This causes their patients undue physical and emotional pain.

Wrapped up in these implications is the issue of privacy and how privacy rights will be violated by those seeking to track down abortion patients. If the police begin tracking citizens to see where they go, even out of state, or what medications they receive via mail, then we should all be worried about this potential breach in privacy rights.

In striking down *Roe v. Wade*, the US Supreme Court has kicked this power over reproductive health rights back to the states which means each state's legislature will determine their state's rules around abortion. It is more important than ever to consider carefully which candidate to vote for at the state level, including legislators, the local sheriffs who choose whether to arrest providers and pregnant people, and the state and county district attorneys who choose whether to prosecute them.

Voting is more important than ever. In next month's post, we'll consider what else we can do to counteract the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*. We'll also take a more in-depth look at what the Bible has to say about fetal life and abortion as well as how what happens in the US often influences the rest of the world. In the meantime, feel free to forward this post to those you think might be interested in reading it. I hope you will consider the best way you can love your neighbors as God has called each of us to do.

*Matthew 22:36-40 - "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

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