

F. Scott Fitzgerald famously said there are no second acts in American life. But he never met Abby Johnson.

Abby Johnson worked for eight years for Planned Parenthood in Bryan, Texas. She started out as an escort, helping women into the clinic, walking them past protestors — sometimes encountering death threats. She eventually became a director of the clinic and in 2008 was named "Employee of the Year." But on a September morning in 2009, she was asked to do something she had never done before: assist with an abortion, by watching the ultrasound. What she saw wasn't the routine procedure she expected. What she saw was a child struggling for its life. A few weeks later, she quit her job and became a pro-life activist. She went on to write a book about her decision and in 2011 she and her husband joined the Catholic Church. She now runs a group called "And Then There Were None," which helps abortion workers transition out of that industry.

Abby Johnson gave an interview to a Catholic paper and she said something that is quite haunting. In the interview, she said that the church needs to take a bigger role in talking about abortion. A priest asked her, skeptically: "How often do you really expect priests to talk about this?"

She replied: "I don't know, Father, but when I worked at Planned Parenthood, it was pretty common for women to be lying on the abortion table while holding a rosary. You tell me how often we need to be talking about this."

Yes, we need to be talking about this, especially in light of law passed in New York State expanding abortion up to the point of giving birth.

Yes, we need to be talking about working and praying to end something that has become shockingly commonplace in our cities and our culture. We need to be talking about creating and encouraging a culture of life. But we also need to be talking about something that is too often lost in these discussions: the woman on that table.

Along the same line of Abby Johnson's interview, a woman by the name of Maura Byrne, a pro-life speaker and activist, wrote about her own experience of abortion on her blog. She went to the heart of the issue: "I had an abortion," she wrote. "How does God see me?"

I imagine it's a question on the minds of many women, maybe some in this church this weekend. Maura's answer to that question was so simple-but to many of us, so elusive and hard to accept. "God just loves," she wrote. "He could never and would never take away that love."

It sounds impossible. But it's true.

In today's second reading, we hear again St. Paul's eloquent and familiar words about love, words we often hear proclaimed at weddings or see printed on greeting cards. We have sentimentalized them, I think, and decorated them with hearts and flowers. But the truth about love is much greater, much wider, than we realize.

Paul was writing to the people of Corinth, telling them how to live with one another. But he was also offering them in a few short paragraphs something eternal, and

eternally hopeful. We all know that God is love. And, so, we need to remember: love is of God.

To anyone struggling with a hurt that won't heal, a guilt that won't end, a fear that can't be dispelled, take heart and know hope. Paul's words remind us that God's tender mercies are boundless. Because God is love.

God is patient. God is kind. God bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. God never fails.

That is what makes all the difference. The love that redeemed us on the cross redeems us from the crosses of daily living-our struggles, our weaknesses, our continuing stumbles and setbacks. It forgives the sins that we may think, wrongly, are unforgivable.

As Pope Saint John Paul II once put it: "We are not the sum of our failures, but the sum of our Father's love." It is a message we all need to hear. But it speaks directly and powerfully to those living with abortion.

Having an abortion doesn't need to be the end of the story. It doesn't need to be what defines a woman. It didn't for Maura Byrne and countless others like her. The sacrament of reconciliation is here for her as it is for anyone.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is there as a way of beginning one's conversation with God. He is waiting, eager to listen. That conversation with God can continue with ministries like Project Rachel" which offers support to both women and men who are living with the aftermath of abortion.

This is not something we like to talk about. But we need to. Statistically, Catholics have abortions at the same rate as anyone else. We need to look at that reality with clarity, with compassion, with love. The fact is abortion isn't something that happens to other people. It happens to us. While we work to make it happen less, and make abortion a thing of the past, we also need to work to help those who still bear the scars. We need to pray for them. Walk with them. Help them to know hope.

After she left Planned Parenthood, Abby Johnson revealed that she was not only an employee, but she was also a client. She had undergone two abortions herself. But her life gives testimony to a powerful truth that lies at the heart of our faith. It is as old as the gospel.

It is conversion, redemption, the faith in being able to live another way, to take another path. It is why the blind see and the lame walk. It is why Abby Johnson is able to share her story with the world.

It's why there are second acts in American life-and every life.

It is possible for one simple reason: God does not give up on us. We are "the sum of our Father's love."

We can never forget that. And we can never forget what Paul told the Corinthians:

Love-extravagant, merciful, beautiful love, the love that is of God-never fails.