Yes…And

Exodus 16:2-18 Kimby Young

Philippians 4:11-13 September 24, 2017

There are many times we need to say no. When someone asks you to do something wrong. When injustice is being done and you can stand up for what is right. When you are being hurt. Even when you get asked to do something worthwhile but you know you really can’t add another minute to your week and you know you would not give your best. There are many times to say no. In fact, sometimes I think I should teach a class to good people like you which might start with the practice of “Repeat after me…no.” Some of us need to learn to say no to give us a little willpower and courage.

However, today, I want to talk about yes – A faithful yes, that is. Sometimes we say no when we are afraid, or when we think we won’t succeed. Sometimes we say no when we are hoarding our resources, or when we don’t want to work as hard as a “yes” would require. Sometimes we say no when we don’t think we can do something – but really we can. Sometimes we limit ourselves. And even worse, we limit God. We don’t trust God. We don’t believe God can do all that God can do. We don’t believe God can work through us to accomplish miracles. As I was beginning to work on this sermon this week, I heard the Jeremy Camp song “The Same Power” on the radio. This song speaks of the power of God in us – the power to do anything, the power of resurrection, the power to move mountains, the power that brings life. That same power of God lives in us, and makes us able to respond. And makes us able to do miraculous things. Sometimes I forget that. Sometimes I depend on my own abilities and forget that it is God’s power that counts. I can fail. I can be weak. I can doubt. I can have limited abilities. But God… God can do anything. Absolutely. Anything.

So in ministry in the last few years – the phrase I used as the title of this sermon has been popular for encouraging creativity and growth. “Yes…And.” I think it actually came from a business model originally. The idea is don’t say “no,” don’t even say “yes, but.” Say yes and try to add value to the idea. For example, one of you might come to me and say, “I’d like to teach a class on basic automobile maintenance.” I would say, “Yes… and let’s try to market that to single women in the area.” Say “Yes… and” whenever possible. Don’t start with the barriers and limitations. Think instead of the possibilities, empower positive thinking, imagine multiplying programs and ministries, and see what God can do thru you. Say yes whenever possible – and add to that even more. Try. And try again. Everything will not succeed. In fact, most of what we try will not succeed. But we should just keep on trying, keep on dreaming, keep on serving as freely and as fully as we possibly can. Try anything. Try everything. And God will bless your efforts. God will bless you. Yes… and … inspire even more blessing.

I bring all this up now – I have been thinking about “yes…and” now – because this is where we are in our ministry here at First Presbyterian Church. It is time for us to say “yes…and.” It is time for us to imagine, and try, and dream, and … trust God. It is time for us to try new things, to say “Yes, God can grow this church if we are willing to try. We could continue as we are. We are comfortable as we are. We are happy – or mostly so – as a community of faith. But I believe God is calling us to more. Our session believes God is calling us to grow and reach out and bless the world as we have been blessed. It is time for us to say to God “yes…and.”

We are nothing like the people of Israel in the story from Exodus. They were grumbling in the wilderness, complaining that God had taken them out of Egypt only to make life hard. Now they sound pretty bad in the story – but really – they were just frightened. They literally did not know where their next meal was coming from. They had nowhere to sleep, no land to call home, no safety. They were refugees with no resources and very few skills. So really – they were far braver than I am. They left their home on the word of a stranger - Moses. They left everything they had ever known, trusting in God to save them. Trusting in God to provide. So this momentary lapse, this complaining in the wilderness – I can understand that. I wonder if I would have done even half as well. And God not only forgave them for their grumbling. God gave them exactly what they asked for – exactly what they needed – meat in the evening, bread in the morning. Leadership and training. Protection, possibility… a whole new life – a life that led to the Promised Land.

So, back to us. We are so much better off than the Israelites. We not only know where our next meals are coming from, we know that we are safe and sheltered. We know that we can meet here every week and support one another. We know that we have resources in abundance. We know we have people to depend on. And like the Israelites we know that God is with us. We know that God provided for them, and for countless others for generation upon generation. We know that God has provided for us here on this corner for 150 years. And God will continue to provide for us. We know how God has always loved us and always will. We even know more about that love than the Israelites knew. We know about the love shown in Jesus Christ – a love that knows no end, a love that conquers death, a love that blesses and multiplies, a love for each and every one of us.

So how can we not trust God? How can we not move forward in faith saying “yes, Lord, yes, lead us where you want us to go?” Yes, Lord we will acknowledge your gifts and we will offer our best.

Today, with this sermon, we are launching our stewardship campaign for the season. For those of you who don’t know, stewardship is when we think about our giving for next year – our time and talent and money. We will be asked to make pledges or promises about what we will offer. I encourage you this week, this month, to pray about that – to think about what gifts you will be able to share. Meanwhile the session will be doing the same. We will be planning our budget for next year. We will be planning our programs. Now frankly, we are running a little short this year financially. It’s nothing drastic. It’s nothing that will damage the church. But our shortfall is enough to limit our dreaming. And next year we will have a challenge. We will need to receive at least twenty thousand dollars more in income just to maintain our current level of mission and ministry. What we would prefer to do is add to our program and start some important new ministries. We would like to add a worship service. We would like to increase our mission to the needy. We would like to improve our programming for young adults – to attract young adults. We would like to reach out into the growing community of Gardner and attract new members. But all of that will take more money, more time and more volunteers. All of that will require profound faithfulness. All of that will require trust in God and a willingness to try. All of that will require a “yes”… and … so much more.

People of God, this is our time – to trust in God, to step out in faith, to believe God will provide, to offer what we have, and to be all that God has created us to be. This is our time – to try new things. This is our time – to be courageous, to know that God will make us able. Expect Manna in the morning, and love every single moment of every single day. Expect God’s goodness to overflow. Expect God to be with us, to lead us, to inspire us, to use us and to love us beyond measure – as God always has and as God always will. People of God, trust in God. Together let us say “Yes… and” … imagine what God will do by the grace of Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit. Amen.