

7th Sunday After the Epiphany (B/RCL)
February 19, 2006
2 Corinthians 1.18-22
Holy Trinity, Manasquan

There wasn't much of a question what I would preach about this weekend. Our epistle, St. Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, includes the verses I chose for the back of my business cards:

The Son of God, Christ Jesus... was never a blend of Yes and No.
With him it was and is, Yes. He is the Yes pronounced upon
God's promises, every one of them.
2 Corinthians 1.19-20

I gave a lot of thought to that Scripture verse for the flip side of my cards. I have many favorites, but I knew this had to be something that would be Good News to anyone who read it: the hospitalized person at whose bedside I would leave the card, the bereaved family member I'd send a sympathy card to, the brides and grooms who would receive my card in their wedding packet, the college kid I'd send a quick note to, the person who might pull my card out of a restaurant "fish bowl", in case I won a free lunch ☺. To me, these verses are Good News whether you're jumping with joy or staggering under a heavy load of grief.

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The shorthand for that message is, "God keeps God's promises. Just look at Jesus Christ, in whom all our dreams come true." St. Paul put it a different way in his letter to the Romans, chapter 8 (verse 32):

He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else?
Every divine promise will be kept, all holy dreams will be realized, salvation **will** be and already **is**, ours.

As many of you know, I was in the fertility process twice. The first time was gloriously successful and resulted in Kristiane's birth. The second time seemed like a crash and burn and resulted in Kristiane's remaining an only child. After the shattering disappointment of the second time through, I asked a pastor friend of mine, "Have you ever heard a cosmic No from God?" He looked a little puzzled and said he never had. I thought, "Oh, well, 'guess he won't understand how **I'm** feeling, then." I felt that I had laid my fondest hopes on the line and had them dashed. I believed that Kristiane was God's Yes to me, and that now I was receiving a deafening No. I was left not doing any fancy theological **debating**, but just plain **hurting** and wondering why No was the answer I got from the God who loved me in every other way.

My pastor friend couldn't identify with the feeling of betrayal by God that I had and the intense sense that the universe was not supporting my dearest hopes and dreams, but maybe you can.... Have you ever felt that God screamed No at you when all you wanted and needed was a ready Yes? It could have had to do with your health or a loved one's, with a precious relationship, with marriage, pregnancy, adoption, a career goal or finances. If God's apparent answer of No ever stung your ears or heart, maybe you, too, wonder what it means that:

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God's promises, every one of them.

For some insight, let's backtrack to last week's Gospel, which many folks didn't hear because of the snowstorm ☺. It was the story of Jesus' encounter with a leper who cried out to him,

"If you choose, you can make me clean." (Mark 1.40)

Some folks commenting on that line have said that the leper's faith was a little shaky, since he doesn't show absolute certainty that Jesus will heal him. I totally disagree with

that line of reasoning. I think the leper understood the reality that **God does not always choose to heal us** in ways we ask or recognize. Praying to God isn't like calling for take-out. You don't necessarily get what you order. The outcome of prayer is up to God not us. It's not a matter of using the perfect words or being perfectly assured that God will heal. Sometimes God does and sometimes God doesn't. Isn't that what life teaches us?? God isn't Santa. God is God. God isn't the shopping network. God is God.

In the leper's case, Jesus said,

“I do choose. Be made clean!” (Mark 1.41)

Alleluia! Wonderful! In the midst of my first fertility treatments, God said,

“I do choose. Be pregnant!”

And then on another day, in another year, God said,

“I do not choose to give you another child. Love the child I have already given you more deeply.”

Why?? Who knows? Why do some people live to tell the story of recovering from near-fatal accidents and near-fatal diseases, and others either die or live years afterward on life support? Who can say?? As the psalmist says, the ways of God are inscrutable. God is impossible to figure out. God is bigger than our little pea brains....

Another fancier way to put it is that God has absolute sovereignty. God reigns in this universe. No one second-guesses the king. God is not required to give explanations. As God said to Job,

“Were you there when I laid the foundation of the earth?”
Job 38.4

What it **is** possible for us to understand, though, the most important thing of all for us to believe and trust in, through the power of the Holy Spirit, is that **salvation is ours** through what God has done in Jesus Christ. We may not have the number of children or the spouse or the home or the career we hoped for, but we have abundant life

now and eternal life in the world to come. God's love careens into our lives through the means of grace, through Word and Sacrament, in the best of times and the worst of times. Any other "no" along the Way is **nothing** compared to the **Yes** God has spoken through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Scripture doesn't promised specific blessings for my little life. Scripture **does** promise **big** blessings for **all** of us, though, such as the peace that passes understanding for those who do God's will, comfort for the sorrowing, mercy for the merciful, light for the blind, joy for the sorrowing, life for those who are willing to take up the cross and follow the Crucified and Risen One, a warm welcome for those who recognize and serve their Lord in the lost, the least and the last.

When you wonder why God has spoken a small no to you, remember the big Yes God has already spoken, and affirm with St. Paul that:

The Son of God, Christ Jesus... was never a blend of Yes and No. With him it was and is, Yes. He is the Yes pronounced upon God's promises, every one of them.

Amen

Pastor Mary Virginia Olson