

Scriptures: Psalm 139:1-18, 23-24

¹ O LORD, you have searched me and known me.

² You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away.

³ You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways.

⁴ Even before a word is on my tongue, O LORD, you know it completely.

⁵ You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.

⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it.

⁷ Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?

⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

⁹ If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,

¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.

¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night,"

¹² even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.

For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb.

¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.

¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you; when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

¹⁶ Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed.

¹⁷ How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!

¹⁸ I try to count them—they are more than the sand; I come to the end^[a]—I am still with you.

²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts.

²⁴ See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Background: Paul planted the church at Corinth and has made a promise to visit. He has not made the visit, and the congregation is irritated. In this portion of the letter, he is explaining himself saying that he is not fickle, but had to be faithful to God's plans first. His plans changed because God's priorities come first.

2 Corinthians 1:17-24

¹⁷ Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this? Do I make my plans according to ordinary human standards, ready to say "Yes, yes" and "No, no" at the same time? ¹⁸ As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been "Yes and No." ¹⁹ For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not "Yes and No"; but in him it is always "Yes." ²⁰ For in him every one of God's promises is a "Yes." For this reason it is through him that we say the "Amen," to the glory of God. ²¹ But it is God who establishes us with you

in Christ and has anointed us, ²²by putting his seal on us and giving us his Spirit in our hearts as a first installment. ²³But I call on God as witness against me: it was to spare you that I did not come again to Corinth. ²⁴I do not mean to imply that we lord it over your faith; rather, we are workers with you for your joy, because you stand firm in the faith.

Proclamation of the Word

We love to hear the word, “Yes!”

After working up the courage to ask a girl to the prom, afraid of the rejection, the guy is relieved and elated when she says, “Yes!” No doubt or hesitation, just Yes!

Or when we have had surgery or an accident and begrudgingly have to our neighbor to drive us to an appointment. You hate to ask someone for help and to impose. You're your neighbor says, “Yes, I'd be glad to.” You are thankful.

Yes! Feels good. A clear, resounding Yes, no waffling or hesitation. We know the person is all in. We need to say Yes! , too.

As a parent, I think about the requests I receive. Even if I have work or other things on my to do list, I am aware that these are rare. When the kids were little,

Mama, do you love me? Yes! All the way to the moon and back.

Will you play ping pong with me, mama? Yes! ...even though the dirty dishes will sit there.

Can I give you a makeover, mama? Yes!...even though I was planning to pay bills. No hesitation, no waffling...these opportunities will not come forever.

Or when someone approaches you and asks, “Do you have a minute? Yes! And you find out that this was a significant moment, important matters were going on.

We need to hear clear, confident Yes! And we need to speak it.

In the letter to the Corinthians today Paul reminds us that God's Yes to us came in Jesus Christ. God's promises are sure. God is faithful first to us. God says Yes to us- clearly and surely. Our response is a loud AMEN- our Yes back to God.

Listen again this time as it is written in the Message.

²⁰⁻²² *Whatever God has promised gets stamped with the Yes of Jesus. In him, this is what we preach and pray, the great Amen, God's Yes and our Yes together, gloriously evident. God affirms us, making us a sure thing in Christ, putting his Yes within us. By his Spirit he has stamped us with his eternal pledge—a sure beginning of what he is destined to complete.*

So many times we are lukewarm. We do not have a loud and resounding “Yes!” Instead it is a “um...I'm not sure...I'll have to think about it...or the classic, “Yeah, but”

Honey, you want to go to this movie with me. Yeah, but I really need to mow the lawn.

Son, clean your room unless that mess is your science experiment...yeah, but...I got to (fill in the blank) first.

God sometimes tells us “No!” for our own good, but most often God’s acts in a Yes way.

In creating the world, God gets out his big paintbrush and paints the skies. Let there be light- Bam! And it was good! It was real good! That’s God’s yes.

God pushes the land back and create pools of the waters of chaos into oceans. God says, Yes! That’s good.

Over and over, God bends down and sculpts and shapes mountains, animals, and human beings- every time God declares *Yes! That is good. That’s real good.*

God begins on the premise that we are good and created in God’s image. When God bent down like a potter, shaping and forming Adam and Eve, God created people who could care for one another and the earth and the creatures of the earth. God infused something of God’s self in each human, knit us together in our mother’s womb, and says, *Yes! That is good, real good.*

Over and over in the Bible, God give us chance after chance to learn to trust and follow his ways. Even though the world is tainted by sin and limits to our ability to live up to those expectations, God doesn’t say, “I’d love to create some humans, BUT they will just mess things up.” And we do mess things up, whether you choose to believe it or not, the ice caps are melting and this wacky weather proves that the climate, God’s good creation, is unbalanced. Starving children with AIDS in Africa are ignored.

Laws to institute hate and discrimination are brought before State legislatures on a regular basis it seems. Before I sat down to write this sermon, I received an email telling me “Your Christian Freedoms are GONE (all caps)!” because Arizona Governor Jan Brewer vetoed a law which would give businesses the right to not serve homosexuals because of religion. The text read, “This is a (all caps) SIGNIFICANT AND DEVASTATING blow to Christians and churches nationwide. Listen below to see how the veto of this bill is about to alter the face of Christianity in this country forever.”

I usually just click delete and move on. But this time, I clicked “unsubscribe” and then there was a box where I could write comments. My final comment- “Hateful Christians do not honor God.” By saying No to such laws, we are standing on the Yes of God who creates each person in his image and commands us to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

Oh, we do mess up. But God knows searches our hearts, and knows us better than we know ourselves, because God created and loves us. In Psalm 8:3-5 the psalmist declares:

*When I look at the heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
humans that you care for them?*

You have made us a little lower than God and crowned us with honor and glory.

God even values and loves those the world would ignore or discard.

To the babies born in the ER to the Crack-addicted mother, the world may say, you have no value or place. God says, "Yes!" you are mine and I love you. I knit you together in your mother's womb." And then God sends a faith-filled couple to adopt them and love them

To the person who feels like their life has been one big failure, alienated by all who have loved them, the world may say, pull yourself up by your bootstraps. God says, Yes- you are mine and I love you. Ask for help. Start over today, now.

To the one whose dementia has gotten so bad, that his friends have stopped coming by, and whose existence is filled with fear and loneliness, the world may have forgotten him. God says "Yes, you are mine and I love you. I remember you. Remember my love for you."

God's Yes! Comes most loudly and clearly when he sent his son, Jesus into the world to seek and serve the lost, the lonely, and the left-out. And Jesus called us to follow him. All the promises of God are fulfilled in him, who is God's big YES to the world.

Today is Confirmation Sunday for this class of youth. Many of you were baptized before you knew what was going on.

Someone sent me a photo of a little boy and his cat kneeling side by side. Little Johnny and his cat were "playing church" as little Johnny was preaching. His mother smiled as she looked at the window watching them. Then she saw Johnny baptizing the cat in a tub of water.

She called out, "Johnny, stop that! The cat is afraid of water!"

Johnny looked up at her and said, "He should have thought about that before he joined my church."

Baptism is our initiation into the promises of God and into the God's family of faith. In baptism God claims us and seals us with his love and grace until we are ready to claim God and profess our faith. Baptism is God's Yes in Jesus Christ.

The church made promises in your baptism to raise you in faith and to teach and show you what discipleship looks like. They said a clear "Yes!" to you.

Your parents made promises to teach you the stories of Jesus and to tell you of God's love. They promised to pray for you and raise you in the church. They said "Yes!" to all those promises. But now it is your turn to say, "Yes!" to God. Yes, to Faith in Jesus. Yes, to seeking to follow him in your life.

Listen again to these words from our Scripture:

²⁴ *We're not in charge of how you live out the faith, looking over your shoulders, suspiciously critical. We're partners, working alongside you, joyfully expectant. I know that you stand by your own faith, not by ours. (The Message)*

You are standing by your own faith which is a gift from God. Your journey of faith started before you were born, when God knit you together in the secret place. And today marks a significant step, but that journey will

continue as you grow up into your promises. And the God who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete. God is faithful! God in Jesus is the big Yes on which we stand. That is the good news. Even when we doubt or wrestle or lose our way, God is faithful always. You are the crown of God's creation, fearfully and wonderfully made in God's image. You are beloved, and God is pleased with you. You have a lot of life before you. You get to create that life with God's help because God has a plan and a purpose for you. It's important to hear and speak our Yes! God says Yes to you. And it is your turn to respond with Yes! to God. Yes to loving God and loving your neighbor as you love yourself. You are saying Yes to the God who first loved and said Yes to you.

You stand here today on your own, but you are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses visible and invisible. Today you decide to follow God in Jesus Christ.

As I close with a litanyⁱ, I invite you all to respond to the following with "I decided to"

How can you believe in a Savior you've never seen?

How can you study a book that was written centuries ago?

How can you believe in a heaven you cannot see?

How can you believe that God's goodness wins when there is so much pain and violence around us?

How can you believe that the meek should inherit the earth, the mourning will laugh, and the peacemakers will be blessed?

How can you love your enemies?

How can you believe there is a purpose in your life when it is unclear?

How can you continue to pray when you don't get what you want?

If I asked God why God loves you, what would God say?

That is God's Yes to us!

Can I get an "amen?" Amen

Better yet, Can I get a Yes!

ⁱ Adapted from Steven L. Case, Ed., "Deciding to Follow God" in *The Book of Uncommon Prayer*, (Zondervon: Grand Rapids, MI, 2002), p. 95.

I am grateful to Edward Markquart for the shape of this sermon and much of its themes
http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/series_b_yes.htm