

Yes

a sermon

by Dan Griswold

Trinity Reformed Church

Easter Sunday, 2017

Matthew 28:1–10

On that first Easter morning, “Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.”

What they had expected to see was the final resting place of a man who, they thought, was pretty amazing, but who apparently was not as great as they thought he was.

They had expected to see, not their friend, their teacher, their master, but, rather, merely where he had been buried.

They had expected to continue their ritual of mourning for their friend and teacher, and in a way to put aside, to bury, the hopes they had placed in him and the opinion they had held of him.

But they had expected wrong. For instead they encounter the unexpected, the strange, the angelic. And then they — the one Mary and the other Mary, too — they see *him*,

the one they did not expect to see,
the one whose body had been buried in the ground,
the one whose promise had been buried in their hearts,
the one whom they had, within themselves, no hope of seeing.

Jesus is with them, alive, raised by God from death to life. And they respond with joy, falling to their knees so they may grasp his feet and worship him, showing that they now see him as truly the Son of God, and that all they had known of him before — and more — ... was true.

For they are confronted with the joyful truth that God had said “Yes” to Jesus. And with that “Yes” ringing in their ears and echoing in their hearts, they themselves are empowered, *compelled*, to say “Yes.”



There was this car commercial on TV a while back. It’s pretty cute. It has this mom talking about how they got a Subaru when her daughter was born, and it was in the safety of that safe car’s back seat where so many special moments happened for her daughter, who now is no longer in the back seat but rather, as a teenager, sits in the front.

The commercial goes quickly through different stages of this girl’s life, from infancy all the way to teenager-hood. And one of the first snippets in that heartwarming sequence of flashbacks is the mom saying how it was in this very car that her baby girl said her first word. And then you hear in a voice-over a toddler saying quite firmly and decisively, “No!”

(Her first word!)

I just love that. Because, really, we all know how true it is. Sure, not every child’s first word is “No.” It might be “Mama” or “Mine” or “Binkey” or something else. But “No” is

quite typical, and it fits with our experience of children. Because it seems that a necessary part of developing as a person is the ability to say “No.”

Some call it “differentiation.”

Others call it “the terrible twos.”

And still others just call for help.

Whatever you call it, there’s no denying: when a baby begins to say “No,” then truly that baby is developing *personality*.

Now, this capacity for “No” is not a simple matter. Really, it’s a bit of a mixed bag. There’s good and bad with “No.”

It’s not like the more you say “No” the more mature you are. “No” can be not only the sign of developing personality and ego strength; it also can be the sign of a rigid and inflexible attitude that is far from maturity. And that can cause problems.

Sadly, some people never seem to get out of the “No” stage. They’re perpetually negative, responding to every possible circumstance with rejection and criticism. Their entire existence revolves around refusal and is determined by that one little word, “No.”

Others though, have had all the “No” beaten out of them, and they find it difficult to say it. For them, their strategies for self-preservation are expressed through their being (or appearing to be) agreeable. But in saying “Yes” to everyone else, they have said “No” to themselves, over and over again. And even though “Yes” is always on their lips, their hearts are a swirling cauldron of “No.”

I don’t understand for sure why it is that “No” has to be such an important word for our sense of self. But as we see in the perpetually negative and the pathologically positive, “No” appears also to be a sign of our weakness, our brokenness. “No” starts out as the way to embrace and convey personality. But it quickly gets corrupted, leading to conflict, abuse, sorrow, and self-hatred.

It has come to this: many have trouble seeing life in any way other than under the shadow cast by “No.” We live in a world filled with “No,” in which rejection, rancor, and division are used to identify and settle, a world of so much “No,” the constant word spoken in politics, in commerce, in divorce, in criminal justice, in war, and, let’s be honest, in religion.

We have come to identify ourselves by what we reject rather than by what we affirm.

We live with a lot of “No.”

But today, the word is “Yes.”



Easter is about “Yes,” God’s “Yes.” That’s the meaning of Easter. That’s what the resurrection of Jesus means.

The resurrection is God’s “Yes” to Jesus,

who ate with sinners,
and fed the multitudes,

who taught the crowds,
and healed the sick,

who blessed the poor,
and challenged the rich.

In raising Jesus, God said “Yes” to Jesus. In raising the incarnate Son from death to life, God the Father said “Yes” to his Son. In raising Jesus, God said “Yes” to him whose entire ministry, so full of blessing and promise, appeared to *end*

with suffering,
with sorrow,
with agony,
with death,
with ...“No.”

Think, for a moment, about what it would have meant if that had been the end of it all, if cross and tomb and decay were the final word about Jesus.

If the Father had not acted to raise Jesus,

it would have meant God’s “No” to all that came before.
It would have meant God’s rejection of the ministry of Jesus.
It would have meant that Jesus was not the Messiah.
It would have meant that Jesus was wrong and those who killed him were right.

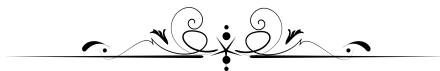
Jesus would have been just a crazy rabbi, at best, or a dangerous heretic, at worst, and following him would have been just as crazy or heretical.

Without the resurrection, without God’s approval of Jesus, without God’s “Yes” spoken in an empty tomb and through a Jesus made alive,

what sense would it make to follow Jesus?
What sense would it make even to follow his *example*?
What sense would it make to say a “Yes”
by following him,
accepting him,
praising him,
adoring him?

Any “Yes” said to Jesus by disciples, by Christians, then or now, makes sense only because of a “Yes” from God, the “Yes” of resurrection.

But God *has* said “Yes” to Jesus. And this makes it possible for us to say “Yes” to him.



You see, the skeptics, the scoffers, the opponents of Christian faith in the risen Jesus (some of them with books detailing their opposition) — they have it wrong. It’s not the faith of the disciples that creates a “myth” of resurrection. Instead, it’s the *reality* of the resurrection, the *truth* of God’s raising Jesus from the dead, that creates the faith of those who believe in Jesus. It’s *God’s* “Yes” to Jesus that brings about *our* “Yes” to Jesus. And any time we do say “Yes,” we repeat the Easter joy, as we, like the two Marys who first saw Jesus, grasp Christ’s feet and worship him.

Yes, truly, the resurrection is God's saying "Yes" to everything about Jesus that came before. By raising Jesus the Son, truly the Father affirms his son's ministry, identifies with his suffering, and embraces his death. With the empty tomb, God drew close to the cross, taking it into his own being, and with it everything that came before in Christ's ministry. And so God is saying that who God really is can be known only in close connection with the entire ministry of Jesus, from the manger to the cross.

When God the Father raised the Son of God from death to life, God was saying "Yes."

Yes, I am near to those who suffer.

Yes, I forgive sinners.

Yes, I befriend the ashamed.

Yes, I show mercy to the unworthy.

Yes, I welcome into the kingdom those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake.

Yes, I give living water to those who thirst.

Yes, I give the bread of life to those who hunger.

Yes, I befriend the enemy.

Yes, I celebrate the prodigal's return.

Yes, yes, truly yes.

That's what the Father says in raising his Son, incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, from death to life.

And when we are joined to Christ, then we can say "Yes" as well, every little yet holy "Yes" we utter, by itself weak and ineffective, being joined to the glorious "Yes" formed in eternity and spoken into time.

In and to a world full of "No," we, too, may say "Yes":

"Yes" to those who suffer,

"Yes" to sinners,

"Yes" to the ashamed,

"Yes" to the unworthy,

"Yes" to the persecuted,

"Yes" to the thirsty,

"Yes" to the hungry,

"Yes" to enemies,

"Yes" to prodigals.

Yes, yes, truly yes.



My friends, the resurrection is God's "Yes" to Jesus.

And it is also God's "Yes" to us.

May it be our "Yes" as well.

As we live in the light of Easter joy, may God give us the grace to be, more and more, people of the "Yes" of the risen Jesus Christ, to the glory of God — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.