

Our Second Reading comes from **2 Corinthians chapter 1, verse 18-22. Listen now for the**

Word of the Lord...

Paul says, “As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been ‘Yes and No.’ 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.’ 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. But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us, by putting his seal on us and giving us his Spirit in our hearts as a first installment.” **This is the Word of the Lord...thanks be to God.**

Now, I don’t know if you realize this or not, but in our reading today Paul is actually trying to dig himself out of a number of holes with this congregation in Corinth. This dialogue about “Yes and No” is because he told them on two occasions he was coming to see them, and then his plans changed, and he did not.

On top of that, Paul says later, the last visit he made there didn’t go very well. Something happened and someone apparently “wronged” the apostle and it created some bad blood.

To make matters even worse, we will find out later, it appears that while Paul was making promises to show up and not doing so, another group of Apostles, whom he dubs the “super apostles,” came through and, to be honest, they were a pretty strong group. Now we all know that in our modern world the rule is always “what have you done for me lately”, and

apparently it was no different in the ancient church. Paul **was** this church's undisputed leader and authority...until this group of high-powered itinerant preachers came along and started messin with his people. Needless to say...Paul's stock had begun to drop in this congregation and as he writes this letter he is desperately trying to keep it afloat and re-establish his status with them.

So what does he do? Well, he does what Paul always does, he turns it into a theological argument. "What me? Wish washy? Why I'll have you know that just as sure is God is faithful, so too our Word to you has not been Yes and NO, for Jesus Christ, whom we preached to you, is always YES!"

Now, this is the equivalent of the session of this church complaining to me "Richard you've been late to every session meeting we've had, why don't you show up on time" and me responding "What me? Late? While I'll have you know that the Jesus Christ I preach to you is always on time." So Paul, I am convinced, and others are too, is trying to talk himself out of a bad situation.

But, you know, he's got a point. And if we can set aside the baggage of Paul's strained relationship with the Corinthian Church, we can focus on this point. Now, interestingly this is what the wise souls who put together the Lectionary reading were trying to do. They took all the baggage of the "being absent" argument and cut out this nice little theological slice of the text, so let's talk about it: What does Paul mean that in Jesus Christ it is always yes, that in him everyone of God's promises is YES?

Now, one of the key theological arguments that early church needed to make was the case that the God of the Old Covenant had not simply abandoned Israel to become the God just of the New Covenant. And honestly, it was a fine line they had to walk. Was God forgetting the promises made to the Jews and forsaking them for a new chosen people? If so, that makes God look kind of “wishy-washy” saying “Yes and then No”.

But, if you read the New Testament you will hear language that constantly rejects this notion. In the Gospel of Matthew for instance, Christ says, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." Now, the word “fulfill” means literally “to fill up “ or figuratively “to bring to completion.” So for Paul and most of the early Church theologians, Jesus Christ was not the replacement of the Old Promises... but in him was found the completion of those promises to make way for something new, something that was not JUST for Israel, but a salvation that was being made available for all who believe in Jesus Christ.

It is really kind of neat way to think of it really. All of this activity that God had put into play for almost 2,000 years with the Jews, was now being dovetailed down into one promise, made evident in the person of Jesus Christ. It is an efficiency that is to be admired.

But, it is also an accommodation that God felt He had to make for us, because it had become increasingly evident that the Old way wasn't working anymore. The Old Covenant being fulfilled and then distilled down to a New Covenant of forgiveness of debts and the gain of eternal life in Jesus Christ simplified things for us. It made the simple matter of faith a

means of receiving the promise. And from there, Paul says, we receive Christ's Spirit as the first installment of the fulfillment of that promise.

So you can see his argument. There is no "NO" in Jesus Christ...there is only a resounding "Yes" for those who turn to and believe in him. The promise of a God who has always been faithful in keeping promises is alive and present in Jesus Christ.

So I would offer to you...that the power of Paul's word is this. The world often says NO, but God in Jesus Christ, always says yes. Humanity put Christ on a Cross and crucified him, which seemed at the time a resounding NO, but God through the empty tomb said YES. Nations come and go, leaders come and go, religions even come and go: and in the process promises are made and promises are broken. The history of humankind is absolutely full of "Yes and No". But the history of God's involvement with humanity...has always been YES.

The history of our own lives, too is probably full of YES and NO. But in Jesus Christ the promise is ultimately YES. It does not matter where you are in life, it does not matter how much you may be suffering right now...the World has this way of constantly saying NO. But God in Jesus Christ is constantly saying yes. You may be in your own life experiencing the horrors of Good Friday. You may be in the process of feeling like you are being crucified. You may be experiencing in your own life the deep sadness of Holy Saturday, the desperation that comes from having no hope of any form of resurrection in your own life. But friends, the promise we have is the YES in Jesus Christ, and that YES is a tomb, which was found empty on a Sunday Morning.

Friends, we worship a God who has always been faithful to his people, and we worship a God who does amazing things like show power through weakness, bring victory out of defeat, and resurrect life and hope from the jaws of certain death. And the world may move back and forth between Yes and No, our lives may sway inconsistently back and forth between Yes and No, but there are no amounts of broken promises or broken dreams that can keep us from God's YES... found in Jesus Christ.

In the name of the father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.