

# God Is Yes

Presented by Pastor Scott Walters on 5/28/19  
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So it must be the case if you are, oh I don't know, if you're Obama, or if you're Hillary, or if you're Donald Trump that the people that don't like you are just always nitpicking, always looking for something to criticize you over. It doesn't have to be anything big; they're just looking to nitpick. This is what happened with the Apostle Paul. So he had this thing; he had his opponents and he had this time where he was going to go to Macedonia. He said, "Yes, I'm going to come." But then plans changed and he had to say, "No, I'm not coming." So his critics jumped all over this and said you're a "yes" and then you're a "no". You are inconsistent. That's just the worst criticism that can be leveled at a politician in our culture, although it's dumb, isn't it? To think that politicians shouldn't change their minds, they're so wrong about so many things. We should wish for them to change their minds. I think about the thing that Winston Churchill said. He said, "I'd rather be right than consistent." Paul's response to his critics is not I really am consistent. And his response isn't I'm right and you're wrong. Instead ... it's so interesting ... under attack he simply points to God and talks about what God is like. He says in God there's no *yes* or *no*. God is always *yes*. Jesus is always *yes*. Jesus is the *yes* to God's promises. This is so hard for us to get our minds around; that God is a *yes*. We tend to think that God is a *no*. God says, "Thou shalt not." You better not. Don't you dare. Like God's sort of the big *no* in the sky telling you what not to do, but Paul says God is not a naysayer. God is a *yes*. God is a *yes* to you; to all of your inner dreams; to all of your quirks. God is inviting you to light. God is drawing you into what is beautiful, into what is delightful, into what is pleasurable, into what is holy. God is *yes*.

One of the things we talked about some recently around the church is how to say yes more than we say no. Church like ours we wind up saying no a lot, and it just makes me crazy. For instance people ... this happens every week multiple times ... somebody drives by our building and they look at it and they go, "Now that's a pretty church." And they phone and they say, "Can we get married there?" And the answer is "no". Except we're trying to figure out how to say yes in some way. So there's a guy that I've been interested in for a long time his name is Danny Meyer. He runs a group of very successful restaurants in New York City, maybe you've eaten at some of them. The Union Square Hospitality Group. And he talks a lot about this, how do you say yes? You've all had this happen. You call a restaurant for reservations and you say, "Can we come and eat at your place tomorrow night at seven o'clock?" And the person on the other end of the phone says, "No. We're booked." Now if you do this in Danny Meyer's restaurants you'll be fired for this. You can't say no, we're booked. What you do is if somebody says can I have a reservation for Saturday at 7? They say, "Hold on. Just a minute. Let me check for you." And they go a check for you and they come back say, "We're so sorry. We can't have you. We're full then, but we can have you at 7:45 or we can call one of our partner restaurants, or we can call the restaurant next door. We want to do something to try to help you to be able to eat on Saturday night." How do we say yes? Somebody calls the church, "Can we get married there?" We can say, "No." Or we could say, "When are you getting married? Congratulations. That's so cool that you found someone. That's really special. You know we have a premarital class at our church and a lot of young couples. We'd love for you to come be part of them. How do we learn how to say yes instead of no in the Christian life? How do we live the Christian life period?"

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I have a friend named Sam Wells. He was for many years the Dean of the Duke Chapel. He now is director of St. Martin-in-the-Fields in Trafalgar Square there in London. And Sam wrote a book about Christian ethics years ago and he entitled it, *Improvisation*. And what he suggested in this book is that the Christian life is like so much improvisation. Now I've not been on stage much in my life, but I have a few times doing community theater. And when it happens something inevitably breaks down, you know, like Robert forgets his line and we've got to kind of figure it out as we go. We have to kind of improvise. There's actually a whole art form that is improv theater; people walk out and they do this. And the key to improvisation, Sam says and he's right about this, is that it's not about being clever, it's not about being creative, it's about knowing the story, it's about knowing the character so that in the pressure of the moment you can improvise in a way that makes good sense.

A lot of the good things that happen in the world are a matter of improvisation. So let's take that pilot, Capt. Sullenberger, remember him? He had a plane going up in New York City; had 155 passengers on it including 2 people from our church family. And that flight went bad in a hurry. He did something he had never done before and he didn't even know how to do. But he was up in the air and he had to land the plane somewhere and it could be into the buildings or it could be into the water, so he landed it in the water successfully. What he did to be able to do that is like you and I couldn't have pulled that off, could we? But what he could draw on was his years of training, his years of experience, his years of hearing about. All that he knew ... he was able to pull that together; he was able to improvise. He was able to put that plane on the ground.

In October, 2006 a man named Charles Roberts came into an Amish community and opened fire. He shot 10 children and five of them died. Now the Amish had to improvise cause they'd never had this happen before. They'd never lived in a place where people came and opened fire, so that had to figure out what to do. But what they had was that for years they'd gone to church and they'd heard about forgiveness and it was kind of all they had to fall back on. So they went to the mother of Charles Roberts and they forgave. They were making it up as they went along and yet they weren't. They were calling on the resources that they had. Improvising. When you improvise on stage there are three things that you can do and the technical terms are you can block, or you can accept, or you can over-accept. Tina Fey ... I just love saying that in a sermon by the way. Tina Fey. Like I love her, but it's hard to work her into a sermon, but it works today, so. Tina Fey was talking about how to improvise on stage. The example she gives is this. If somebody comes out and they say, "I have a gun." Now the way to block that is to say, "That's not a gun; that's just your finger." That's the end of the conversation, right? But if you come out and say, "I've got a gun." And the other person says, "Is that the gun I gave you for your birthday?" Then you're off and running, right? And the story is going to go somewhere good.

I saw a story about some parents who took their child to a classical piano concert. The child was too young to be there, but they took their child, I guess assuming the child would get some culture. So they're sitting out there and the pianist comes out and starts playing and the child gets away from the parents and is running up and down the aisles screaming. The parents, of course, are mortified and they try to apprehend the child and the child gets away from them again and makes it all the way up onto the stage and lands on the piano bench. The pianist backs up and the child starts banging on the piano. The pianist has some choices. He can block. He can say to the ushers, "Get this child out of here!" Or he can accept, which is to stand back and say, "A child's playing; I'm done." But instead what this pianist did is

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he over-accepted. So he comes up behind the child who's banging on the piano and he simply bends over and he puts his hands outside her hands and whatever notes she plays, he does something creative with those notes. Got to improvise around it; makes it into something pretty. She looks up, she plays; he plays. Over-accepting. Over-accepting.

Memorial Day. We think about soldiers who lost their life in the war. One of my favorite war stories ... you've heard this before ... happened back during WWI. It came to be Christmas Day. And you had the German soldiers there in their trench and then you had no man's land with all the barbed wire and so on. Then over here you had the Allies in their trench and it was Christmas Day and somebody got this brilliant idea to ... one of the Germans ... they had a rum cake and they lobbed it across no man's land into the Allied trench. The Allies thought oh a cake; it's Christmas. So they had a bottle of rum and they lobbed that across no man's land into the German trench and pretty soon a Christmas tree came back. And they lobbed gifts back and forth at one another and finally one person came out into no man's land then somebody from the other side came out. They weren't shooting and they met in the middle of no man's land; they began to sing *Stille Nacht, Silent Night*. The officers of the squadrons discouraged them from doing this. They said if we fraternize too much we won't have the will to fight when Christmas is over. You see the soldiers had an option there. It's Christmas Day, it's WWI, you're in your trenches, you could block. And the blocking might be something like it's Christmas, they're probably not ready to fight. Let's really hit 'em hard; get rid of them. Or you could just accept; say it's Christmas Day, let's just take a nap. But instead what they did is they over-accepted. Let's try the rum; let's try the cake; let's try the trees; let's try the *Silent Night*.

Sam Wells uses the example of Princess Diana after she had separated from Prince Charles and a reporter asked her will you ever be Queen of England? Now if she's blocking she could have said I will be queen. Or she could have said Charles doesn't love me; I'll never be queen. But instead what she said was just really lovely. She said, "I hope I will be queen in the hearts of the British people." Over-accepting.

Jesus is all about God over-accepting. I mean God looks down at the world and the mess that the world is in. God looks down at us and the mess that we make of our lives. God could block. God could be like those Mesopotamian gods and just hurl down some thunder bolts and strike them dead for being such nincompoops. Or God could just say just let them be; just leave them on their own down there. But instead God over-accepts and he becomes one of us. He came down on that silent night, that holy night, entered into our mortal frame to redeem us. Full story at the end of Jesus' life is about over-accepting. I mean Jesus is there; he knows the soldiers are after him. He could have run to try to get away. Or he could have just died and said ah I'm dead. But instead God came down and raised him from the tomb so there would be new life. God's way is always this business of over-accepting. God's mercy is always God over-accepting each one of us.

About an hour and a half ago I preached down the hall in Jubilee Hall at our Church in the Round service. That was fun and the thing I could do there that I can't do here is I could put a big image up on a screen. You know we could tear this cross down and put a screen up here. That'd be really popular now, wouldn't it? But there I could put a picture up on the screen and the picture I had on the screen today while I was preaching was a painting by Lucas Cranach and it's in a church in eastern Germany

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that I got to visit a few years ago. It's the church in Wittenberg where Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the church door that sparked off the protestant reformation. It's the church where Luther preached; it's the church where Luther is buried now. One year after Luther died, Cranach provided this painting to the church and it's a painting of the Last Supper and it's exactly what you would expect. There's a table with the food and the wine and there's Jesus and there are the disciples and kind of strangely at this end of the table, there's Martin Luther. And this makes modern people crazy cause we're like Martin Luther wasn't there but medieval artists do this all the time. You go the Assisi, the church that shows the crucifixion of Jesus, there's St. Francis at the foot of the cross. So we say Francis wasn't there at the crucifixion, but theologically those artists have it exactly right. Luther was included with Jesus and the disciples; Francis was there at the death and resurrection of Jesus.

You and I are included in this life of God. Church people get this wrong all the time. There're always church people who want to block instead of over-accepting. I was just with some of them. I was in Portland, Oregon, at our denomination's quadrennial meeting and there're just a lot of loud voices there who think it's the church's job to say no to certain people cause of who they are, because of what they're like, because of what they've done. They think it's the church's job to say no, but Paul says that Jesus is God's *yes*. Martin Luther is included at that table. You and I, all of us, we're not blocked by God and God doesn't just leave us alone. God reaches out and embraces us and loves us; says *yes*. Wants us to say *yes*. That's what we do today at this Lord's Table. Saying *yes* to God who's always *yes* and not no. Thanks be to God.