

April 24, 2016 5th Sunday of Easter
Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope

Acts 11:1-18, Psalm 148
Revelations 21:1-6, John 13:31-35

(References: David Shannon, *No, David!* 1998)

Grace and peace to you, beloved of Christ. Amen.

David Shannon begins his children's book with an Author's Note.

He writes, and I quote: "A few years ago my mother sent me a book I made when I was a little boy.

It was called 'No, David!' and was illustrated with drawings of David doing all sorts of things he wasn't supposed to do. The text consisted entirely of the words 'no' and 'David'."

David Shannon, the adult, adds in parentheses, that no and David were the only two words he could write at the time, and then he continues, "I thought it would be fun to do a remake celebrating the familiar variations of the universal 'no' we all experience while growing up."

So that's what he does, a book wonderfully illustrating little David's shenanigans, interspersed with the occasional, screech-y, 'No, David!'...

Teetering on stacked books while reaching for the fish bowl, overflowing the bathtub while playing pirate.

As I recall, there's some sort of redemption at the end, but truth is, it's No, David, No! that I remember best.

This life, this world, is filled with plenty of the message No, and variations on that theme.

As anyone who's gotten *that* letter, faced unemployment, or struggled in relationship, or watched presidential politics, or taken a breath, is aware, this message of No isn't reserved for just the kids.

It slips out of my mouth with regular ease,

it gets drilled into our brains at an early age and it lingers our lifetimes,

it's the bedrock of many religious traditions and certainly has a foothold in the theology and pietistic movements that have driven popular Christianity for generations.

No dancing, no card playing, no sex, though a little outdated, those come to mind easily, but we've all had our share of that subtly infused message that God is watching and the answer is always No.

I say all of this, because today is about Yes. Our yes, God's yes, and the yes our world cries to hear.

Our reading from Acts, is a big Yes. It is part of what we sometimes call, the Gentile Pentecost.

Remember the story? Peter's vision? The sheet coming down from heaven filled with animals that Peter in his tradition would have known as unclean, profane?

"Get up, kill and eat," God says, but Peter is adamant, "No, I can't."

God persists, Peter persists, and finally the Spirit has her way, and No turns to Yes:

In this second Pentecost, the Holy Spirit is for everyone; What God has made clean, do not call profane.

Yes, even the Gentiles. Yes is the answer.

Yes...and still today, two centuries and so many generations later we struggle to believe that God's Yes is truly Yes, even for me, even for *those* people, even for our world.

So we throw up a road block or two, and we practice our faith from a place of fret and fear and worry.

God's Yes is right there in the vision at the very end of Revelation: Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth...Death and mourning and crying and pain will be no more...See, I am making all things new.

And in the Gospel, another Yes: I give you a new commandment, that you love one another.

As I have loved you, love one another.

Dear people of Christ, all the No's, all the stumbling blocks, all the dead ends: In Christ's death and resurrection, God says it again, unconditionally, with love in her eyes: Yes, you are my beloved, Yes.

And today in our worship, God says Yes, and we respond with Yes.

New Member Sunday happens about when people come up and say things like **Tom and Sue xxxxxx** did: After ministry and lives took them to Florida for a time, they came to me one Sunday and said, We're back in Minnesota, yes, we want to officially be back in this community of faith.

It happens when Abigail xxxxxx and I sit together at a coffee shop and we talk about vocation and the way she's following God's call and accepting a cool new position with Wilderness Inquiry working part of the year leading their program in the Apostle Islands out of Little Sand Bay.

And then even knowing she'll head north shortly, we wonder together about membership and taking the leap to be part of this community of faith, and she says, Yes, that what I want, yes, that's what I need.

It happens when Lance xxxxxx says I want to be a member, but first I want to be confirmed.

And we talk about how confirmation is also called Affirmation of Baptism, affirming, saying Yes to these baptismal promises, God's promise: Yes, I want to live in these promises.

Listen today as Lance shares part of his faith statement and how he practices his faith, his baptism.

But listen too, for this whole community, responding in Yes, Yes, we'll be a place that nurtures and uplifts, that makes space for questions and yet also grounds, a community where God's Yes is real.

Let me be clear, this Yes isn't an easy, anything goes, kind-of-yes, but rather it's a Yes rooted in Christ's death, a Yes God embodies raising Jesus to life, and a Yes we live out daily in our work and family.

It's a Yes we experience around Christ's table Sunday after Sunday,

And, it's a Yes that at-its-best grounds our decisions, our actions, our justice, our values all thru the week.

When the world's No is too loud, when it rings in our ears, let us be God's people who say again, over and over, thru our tears and by our trust, in our love for the earth and for one another, Yes. Yes. Yes. Amen.