

“God’s ‘Yes!’”

1 Corinthians 15:19-26; Luke 24:1-12

An Easter Homily by Rev. Dr. Ivan H.M. Peden

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Easter is Good News! It is great news! It is wonderful news! For a Christian, it is the best news ever! And what is the news? We declared and sang the news earlier: “Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Christ the Lord is risen today! Alleluia!” The risen Christ is God’s great “Yes!” Whereas the crucifixion was the world saying “No!” to Jesus; the resurrection was God saying “Yes!” to the world!

The resurrection is the fulfillment of God’s promise that Jesus *is* the First and the Last ...Jesus *is* the *Alpha* and the *Omega* ...Jesus *is* the Beginning and the End ...and that because Jesus lives, we *shall* live also. When the world yells “No!” away with him; crucify him!” God makes a magnificent and maximum positive response which is to raise Christ from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus is God’s grandest “Yes!” It turns the funeral dirge of the crucifixion into a victory march of the resurrection. It is the fulfillment of God’s promise that nothing in life or in death can separate us from God’s love ...that those who are in Christ *are* new creatures ...that in the bulb there *is* a flower ...that in the seed there *is* an apple tree ...that in cocoons there *is* the hidden promise of a butterfly ...that there *is* freedom from our captivity to sin and death. We all need a word of hope, a “Yes!” in our lives, and there is hope in the Easter gospel.

Easter began early that Sunday morning in a misty garden when some disciples ran to the tomb where Jesus had been laid only to find it empty. Jesus’ body was no longer there because Easter began as God’s “Yes!” when Jesus burst out of the linen wrappings ...when the angels rolled the stone from the entrance to the tomb ...and when Jesus emerged alive, victorious over death, in radiant resurrected splendor as the Lord of all Life. This was God’s “Yes!” to Jesus’ sacrificial life and inclusive ministry, to Jesus’ way of love and liberation, and to Jesus’ ethic of peace and justice and the way of nonviolence. This was God’s “Yes!” to highly exalting Jesus and giving to Jesus the name that is above every name. Easter is God’s “Yes!” It began with Jesus ...with the resurrection of Jesus, but there is more to this

gracious “Yes!” of God.

Easter is also God’s “Yes!” to us ...to the sanctity of this earthly life ...to our human lives ...each one of our lives. Easter is God saying “Yes!” personally to you and to me ...to your life and to mine ...to the life of my loved one ...to the life of your friend ...to the life of a stranger ...and, listen, God’s “Yes!” even to the life of an enemy! Life is God’s gift; it is a precious commodity; it is to be handled with care and dignity.

I hope you have heard God say “Yes!” to life ...to *your* life before today. If not, I hope you are hearing it either clearly for the first time this morning, or hearing it anew. Listen once more to the most important words you will ever hear: God says “Yes!” to you ... “Yes!” to your life! I want you to grasp the Good News that Easter offers ...feel God’s embrace ...affirm that your life belongs to God and you belong to Christ who died and rose again that you might have abundant life ...and believe that God’s spirit is in the process of recreating your life, always making it newer, better, stronger, healthier, and more willing to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself.

But there is more: Easter is God’s “Yes!” to the joy and promise of the present, but it is also “Yes!” to the future. There is a hymn in our hymnal with this refrain: *Because he lives, I can face tomorrow; because he lives, all fear is gone; because I know he holds the future, and life is worth the living just because he lives.* The resurrection of Christ is our hope for tomorrow. Jesus’ resurrection declares that Jesus has wrapped tomorrow in his concern, and we are free to live today. Easter is God’s “Yes!” to the present and to the future.

Our Epistle reading today from 1 Corinthians chapter 15 reminds us that “death is the last enemy to be destroyed.” Today we also celebrate Easter as God’s “Yes!” to life beyond death. The defining conviction of our Christian hope is that because Jesus was raised from the dead, the grave is not the final reality of human experience. Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ we are assured of God’s everlasting love and the promise of eternal life beyond death.

The evangelist, Dwight L. Moody, was preaching on the subject of death when he was moved to say, “Someday you will read in the newspaper that Dwight L. Moody, the evangelist, is dead. Don’t you believe a word of it! Don’t believe it, I tell you, because at

that moment I will be more alive than ever before.” That’s it! The greatest affirmation of the New Testament is that life is stronger than death! Because Jesus was raised from death, God’s resounding “Yes!” is not only to life, abundant life, but to life beyond death ...to eternal life!

Finally, the Easter reality of the resurrection of Christ is also God’s “Yes!” to the world. “Yes,” God declares, “there is hope for this world that I created, and I have called you to be a partner with me in my world. I have shown you how to live and love one another through Jesus’ life and ministry. Through Jesus’ death and resurrection, I have revealed that I preside over this world and every human experience as Lord.” In spite of the powers of oppression in this world saying “No!” to Jesus and crucifying him, God says “Yes!” to the world by raising Jesus from death ...God says “Yes!” to the living Christ being with us today, tomorrow, and always.

That’s God’s Easter promise to the world: a promise that enables us to see the suffering and brokenness that plague the world with sober yet hopeful eyes. Because Christ’s resurrection is God saying a massive “Yes!” to the world, we can see the hungry being fed, the oppressed being liberated, the sick being healed, the sad being comforted, the stranger being welcomed, and the lonely befriended.

We here at Memorial Church are part of God’s plan to share the Good News of Easter up and down Randolph Street and beyond. And what is that good news? Simply and plainly, it may be summarized in one word: “Yes!” Today we pledge anew to God that we will continue to find different and creative ways of sharing this good news with others.

Easter – with its central focus on the resurrection of Jesus Christ – is the day that God shouted “Yes!” to Jesus who lived our life and died our death. It is the day God shouted “Yes!” to our human life – to your life and to mine ... “Yes!” to our today and to our tomorrow ... “Yes!” to our life beyond death ...and “Yes!” to a world that God loves. God has said “Yes!” so clearly to us. Have we said “Yes!” in response to God who raised Jesus from death, or are we still seeking the living among the dead? Are we still looking for the body of Jesus in a borrowed tomb? I hope you are shouting “Yes!”

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.