

Will You Say Yes? Did You Say Yes?
John 1: 35-50

Troops in other countries operate best when they understand their mission. National Guard members protect our nation best when they understand their mission, a task vastly different from combat troops. Front line workers operate best when they understand their mission and purpose, but in these pandemic times, they are doing their work in makeshift spaces with staff members who are exhausted. Teachers get distracted from their primary mission of teaching by trying to keep students safe. And pastors have never been trained in how to manage the medical, psychological, emotional and spiritual issues we face today. Instead of consulting with other pastors about Bible passages or other Christian ministries, we now consult about how or when or if we can hold groups in person. No seminary trained us in that area! No Church Management class addressed the issues we address today. I have a picture on my phone that was in the News Journal last year: a young woman shifted from a different profession to nursing school because she wanted to help people. She took a picture of herself at her graduation: bright-eyed, smiling, clear skinned, nicely combed hair. Then, after another grueling 12 hours shift, dealing with the anger and frustration of family members, and the debilitating illness facing their loved one, she snapped a selfie: in it, her hair was clinging to her head from sweat, her eyes looked dark and discouraged, her cheekbones protruded, and her cheeks were sunken. The smile was gone. In Afghanistan, we have an unprecedented situation we have had to face and still have to face. Troops again were not trained to do everything they were asked to do; and the clarity of their mission has been opaque for years. There are other situations that may be drawing your own attention today: the death of a loved one and all of the ways your life has changed because of the loss. Sons and daughters are dealing with school starting again, or one special going to college for the first time. Such events can be stressful, but during Covid, anxiety can turn into fear. *We*

have never been here before. So people try to figure things out the best way that they can. What does that include? Portable morgues: makeshift ICUs in parking garages; new rules while trying to learn in school, new hostility regarding vaccinations and masks; new testimonies made through glass from people who wished they hadn't gotten Covid and wished they had chosen to get vaccinated. We are amplifying the claim Dr. Scott Peck made in his book *The Road Less Traveled*. "Life is difficult."

Back around 30 A.D. John, the writer of the Gospel, was living in simpler times. He writes about John the Baptist, who was pointing out one who, by analogy, he called "the Lamb of God." Here again that description was not literal. Lambs in those days were offered on the Day of Atonement and that action was believed to absolve Jews of their sins. Calling Jesus "Lamb" made people wonder. So followers of John the Baptist went to talk to Jesus. "What are you looking for?" he asked. "They answered, "Where are you staying?" likely so they could come and meet with and learn from him. And Jesus replied, "Come and see." They stayed with him the whole day. Later Phillip found Nathaniel and said to him, "We have found the one about whom Moses, and the Law and the prophets wrote." Have you ever tried sharing something sincerely only to have what you said be shot down by sarcastic comments? It happens all the time with children and youth, and in some cases with adults. Nathaniel sounds like he answered in a sneering way: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Nevertheless, after a short exchange of words, even Nathaniel said, "Rabbi, you *are* the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" My goodness! Now *Nathaniel* goes overboard! He said what every gospel writer concluded by the end of their writing; he believed Jesus was the Son of God! Yet Nathaniel declared it in John chapter 1! What an amazing day that was!

Jesus said “follow me” thirteen times in the gospels. That invitation extends to us today too! I slightly modified Jesus’ invitation to ask, “Did you say yes?” Have you said yes to Jesus’ invitation? This week we begin our next Confirmation Class, training our group of youth to the point that they might say “Yes” to Jesus’ invitation. But for now, the rhetorical question to them, and maybe to some of you, is the other question: “Will you follow him?”

If you have said yes, or will say yes, what will you do? How will your life show that you are following Jesus? One example is, at the feeding of the 5000. Jesus saw the crowd and said to his followers, “*You* give them something to eat!” Will you accept, or have you accepted, that invitation? We can now respond as if Jesus were speaking with us. We dutifully collect our food, bring it to church at least once a month, and see that it helps feed hungry people. Jesus said, “I was in prison, and you visited me.” Just this month we remembered the late Bill Hottenstein, a church elder, who visited people in prison. Through him, we sent cards and gifts to prisoners. Visiting prisoners is a very regulated process these days, but helping men who have recently been released is part of our ministry now again. Westminster’s Commissioned Pastor Tobias Caskey began this week to once again helping men in a place called “1st Avenue to Freedom.” Through him and us, we can offer clothes, and bicycles that are repaired, along with prayers for these recently incarcerated men. There are many ways for us to follow Jesus. Perhaps the best summary of our life in Christ is found in what is called the “Sermon on the Mount” from Matthew 7: “Do unto others the things you would like others do to you.” The golden rule.

Pray for those in harm’s way in Afghanistan; pray for our frontline workers; pray for those trying to figure out education in our schools. Pray for your neighbor down the hall, down the street, or across the globe. I pray about those things and more

virtually every week during our Wednesday 7 pm prayer time. I pray out loud for every situation on our prayer list. And we do that every Wednesday night. Christians among others are people who believe in the power of prayer.

Finally, remind yourself each day, in each situation, what you imagine Jesus would do, then do take that action.

If you have decided to follow Jesus, or you decided that years ago, you join the man whose testimonies formed the words of our next hymn. Their lyrics are based on the last words of a man in Garo, Assam. About 150 years ago there was a great revival in the country of Wales. As a result, missionaries came to northeast India to spread the Gospel. Into the hostile and aggressive communities came a group of American Baptist missionaries, spreading the message of love, peace, and hope in Jesus. They were eyed with suspicion and were hardly welcomed. One missionary ended up converting a man, his wife, and his children to Jesus. His faith spread to others in his village. His witness to them included these words; “I have decided to follow Jesus.” In a village of non-Christians, that was a powerful stand; it was dangerous. I’ve known some who rejoiced over news like that. And I used to know a high school Jewish girl who kept her conversations with our youth group away from her parents. She felt they would not support her talking with Christians about Jesus as Lord. Saying yes to Jesus brings rejoicing from some families, and conflicts from others. Perhaps you can make, or reaffirm, your choice today. Did you say “yes” to Jesus? Will you say “yes” to Jesus?

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