

How to say “No”, by saying “Yes”

Message for Sunday, March 10, 2019

Scripture: Matthew 4:1-11

Children’s Message: Ask the children to remember when they’ve been tempted, how they felt inside, and how they handled the situation. Assure them that everyone is tempted—even Jesus was tempted!

Jesus was tempted to turn a stone like this one (*hold up a real stone*) into bread (*hold up a loaf of bread*). Wow, that would be pretty amazing! He was tempted to be the ruler of the entire world, and have all that money and power (*hold up a globe of the world*). Jesus was tempted to jump off the top of the Temple, so that everyone below would see how angels would come and rescue him (*show a drawing of the Temple, the way it was at the time of Jesus*).

Jesus thought, “Hmm, that sounds very inviting! I’d like that... but no, I can’t do that. I’m committed to following God’s way.”

When you and I are tempted, I find it comforting to know that Jesus was also tempted. He trusted God instead of following those desires. You and I can do the same. We need God’s help, though. Temptation can be very powerful, and we need God’s power to help us choose the right way, God’s way. Just like Jesus did.

Message: How to say “No”, by saying “Yes”
“Please put away your toys.” “No!”
“It’s time for bed now.” “No!”
“Please eat your carrots.” “No!”

Isn’t it interesting that one of the first words we learn as a child, is a word that many of us have difficulty saying later in life? Three year olds are very good at saying “No.” For many of us, you might think we’d never heard the word before:

- “I know you’re already busy this morning serving coffee and reading the Bible, but we really need someone to hand out bulletins. Will you do that as well?” “Yes.” (Even though once in a while you’d like to be able to simply come to church and just focus on the worship service.)
- “Before you go out for your church meeting tonight, I need help with my homework. Oh, and can you please make a dozen muffins for

the bake sale at school tomorrow?” “Yes.” (Even though you resent being taken for granted like that.)

- “I want you to go to the hospital for some tests on your pancreas, and get this prescription at the pharmacy. I’ll see you again in three months. OK?” “Yes.” (Even though you desperately want to ask questions about what’s going on with your body.)

Does that sound familiar? We want to keep everyone happy; we want to get along with others. So we say “Yes.”

Maybe it’s time to once again practise saying “No”—but not selfishly like a three year old, but wisely and intentionally like a follower of Jesus. This means we don’t say “No” just because we don’t want to help out, nor because it’s hard, nor because it’s unfamiliar. We say “No” because we’ve already said “Yes” to something else.

We see this is what Jesus did. We read about it in Matthew 4:1-10. Three times the devil tempts Jesus, and three times Jesus has to choose: either “Yes” or “No.”

- “If you are the Son of God, change these stones into loaves of bread.” Yes or no?
- “All these kingdoms and their wealth and glory I will give you, if you kneel down and worship me.” Yes or no?
- “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from the top of the Temple.” Yes or no?

Each time Jesus says “No,” because he has already said “Yes” to something better:

- “Yes, I will trust God to provide. Life is more than food; God’s word is nourishment.”
- “Yes, I trust God to care for me. I don’t need to test God to know God is good.”
- “Yes, I will worship and serve only God.”

Now I don’t think—I hope—you’re going to be tempted this week to use your superpowers to turn stones into food, or to jump off the roof of the church, or to turn your back on God and the church. But you *are* going to be tempted in other ways that are more within your reach.

When you pull out your wallet, you may want to get more, because you’ve convinced yourself you really need it, and it will make you feel good.

When you pick up your phone—“just for a moment” you say—you have Facebook and Instagram and email and Candy Crush all beckoning to you, and their siren voices pull you away from the people around you.

When an opportunity arises to share God’s love with someone, whether in words or actions, you are excited about it. But then you may start to feel doubts, “Do I really want to get involved in this? How long is this going to go on?”

So here’s what I’d like you to do in response to what we see in Jesus. Sometime today, perhaps as late as tomorrow, I want you to make a list of three Christian values to which you have said “Yes.”

They may be the same as Jesus:

- “Yes, I will trust God to provide. Life is more than food; God’s word is nourishment.”
- “Yes, I trust God to care for me. I don’t need to test God to know God is good.”
- “Yes, I will worship and serve only God.”

They may be something different. You’ve heard me before talk about how I value honesty; that’s one of my three.

Think about this, and pray about it. Out of all the things calling for your attention, choose three Christian values to which you say “Yes.” Write them down. Make a couple of copies, and place them where you’ll keep on seeing them. Carry one with you as a reminder. Then through the rest of this week, whenever you have to make a choice about something which is contrary to one of your values, say “Yes” to your value and say “No” to that thing.

Next Steps:

- Pray: what is it about Jesus’ life or his teaching stirs your heart the most? Can you see yourself doing that? Or perhaps some other virtue you see in the rest of the Bible?
- Commit to living three of them. Pray about this, because if you want to be like Jesus, you need his help.
- Write them down, to remind you through the week, and beyond.

While you’re praying and thinking and writing, I’m going to tell a story about how making a choice like

this can transform even something as ordinary as a baseball game. This is from *Echoes of the Maggid* by Paysach Krohn, a Jewish rabbi. The father he talks about is a close friend of his.

Chush is a school in Brooklyn, New York that caters to learning disabled children. Some children remain in Chush for their entire school career.

At a Chush fund-raising dinner, the father of one student delivered a speech that would never be forgotten by all who attended. After extolling the school and its dedicated staff, he cried out, “Where is the perfection in my son, Shay? Everything God does is done with perfection, but my child cannot understand things as other children do. My child cannot remember facts and figures as other children do. Where is God’s perfection?”

The audience was shocked by the question, pained by the father’s anguish and stilled by the piercing query. “I believe,” the father answered, “that when God brings a child like this into the world, the perfection that he seeks is in the way people react to this child.”

He then told the following story about his son Shay: One afternoon, Shay and his father walked past a park where some boys Shay knew were playing baseball. Shay asked, “Do you think they will let me play?”

Shay’s father knew that his son was not at all athletic and that most boys would not want him on their team. But Shay’s father understood that if his son was chosen to play it would give him a comfortable sense of belonging. Shay’s father approached one of the boys in the field and asked if Shay could play. The boy looked around for guidance from his teammates. Getting none, he took matters into his own hands and said “We are losing by six runs and the game is in the eighth inning. I guess he can be on our team and we’ll try to put him up to bat in the ninth inning.”

Shay’s father was ecstatic as Shay smiled broadly. Shay was told to put on a glove and go out to play short center field. In the bottom of the eighth inning, Shay’s team scored a few runs but was still behind by three. In the bottom of the ninth inning, Shay’s team scored again and now with two outs and the bases loaded with the potential winning run on base. Shay was

scheduled to be up. Would the team actually let Shay bat at this juncture and give away their chance to win the game?

Surprisingly, Shay was given the bat. Everyone knew that it was all but impossible because Shay didn't even know how to hold the bat properly, let alone hit with it. However as Shay stepped up to the plate, the pitcher moved a few steps to lob the ball in softly so Shay should at least be able to make contact.

The first pitch came and Shay swung clumsily and missed. One of Shay's team-mates came up to Shay and together they held the bat and faced the pitcher waiting for the next pitch. The pitcher again took a few steps forward to toss the ball softly toward Shay. As the pitch came in, Shay and his teammate swung at the ball and together they hit a slow ground ball to the pitcher.

The pitcher picked up the soft grounder and could easily have thrown the ball to the first baseman. Shay would have been out and that would have ended the game. Instead, the pitcher took the ball and threw it on a high arc to right field, far beyond reach of the first baseman.

Everyone started yelling, "Shay, run to first. Run to first." Never in his life had Shay run to first. He scampered down the baseline wide-eyed and startled. By the time he reached first base, the right fielder had the ball. He could have thrown the ball to the second baseman who would tag out Shay, who was still running. But the right fielder understood what the pitcher's intentions were, so he threw the ball high and far over the third baseman's head.

Everyone yelled, "Run to second, run to second." Shay ran towards second base as the runners ahead of him deliriously circled the bases towards home.

As Shay reached second base, the opposing shortstop ran to him, turned him in the direction of third base and shouted, "Run to third." As Shay rounded third, the boys from both teams ran behind him screaming, "Shay run home."

Shay ran home, stepped on home plate and all 18 boys lifted him on their shoulders and made him the hero, as he had just hit a "grand slam" and won the game for his team.

"That day," said the father softly with tears now rolling down his face, "those 18 boys reached their level of God's perfection."

I told this story to show how powerful it can be when we choose to say "No" and "Yes." The players in this baseball game chose to say "No" to the idea that winning is the most important thing in life, and to say "Yes" to caring for someone. It transformed that afternoon from being just another baseball game into something none of them will ever forget.

When we say "Yes" to God and "No" to temptation, it can transform the situation we're in, and it will certainly transform us.