

Remembering His “Yes” When We Said, “No”

A Communion Meditation

Luke 21:14-20

Have you ever been told “no.” It’s part and parcel of the human experience. Doctors tell us no to two of the most important food groups of all: cookies and ice cream. And no to salt in grits.

On a more serious level, being told “no” is a devastating experience. When I was applying to colleges, Princeton said “no” to me. I still won’t root for them, even against Carolina. Almost twenty years ago First UMC in Rockingham said “no” to me; they thought it would be better if my wife and I, who were copastors at the church, moved. Neither before nor since has a church said that to us. It still hurts. And I confess that when I see First UMC in Rockingham has fewer folks in worship now than they did then, there is an unchristian part of me that takes note, and smiles.

And tonight, in our Scripture, the disciples are in the process of saying “no” to Jesus. Their brave words about following him always will soon give way to more pressing concerns. Judas will say “no” to Jesus and “yes” to 30 pieces of silver. Peter will say “no” to Jesus and “yes” to preserving his life by loudly proclaiming he had never even heard of Jesus. And Luke will record in this same chapter that after the Last Supper a dispute will arise among the disciples, Luke implies it is all the disciples, about which one of them is the greatest. And so they will say “yes” to earthly notions of power and greatness and success and “no” to Jesus’ vision of a New Kingdom. . .at least for a while.

Matthew and Mark will record that after the Last Supper, the disciples will say “yes” to becoming deserters and “no” to keeping faith with Jesus.

So, there is a sadness that hangs heavy in the air at the Lord’s supper. The disciples are telling Jesus no through

betrayal, denial, demanding a special place and deserting him.

But Luke, alone among the disciples, records a commandment of Jesus: Do this in remembrance of me. Eat bread and drink wine. Now, we don't like to be told what to do, even by Jesus. I don't care if we are two, twenty, or one hundred twelve, we are a disobedient lot. And so sometimes we approach the Lord's Supper, Communion, with a sense of obligation and even vague resentment: something we have to do because, well, Jesus told us to.

But "do this in remembrance of me" might not be so much a commandment as it is a gift. By the way, another word for Communion is eucharist, which is from the Greek word which means "to be grateful."

Do this is a gift. It is Jesus saying "yes" to us even when we are saying "no" to him. By the way, eating bread together had long been a sign and symbol of forgiveness and reconciliation, not to mention the fact that the bread was key component of the Passover meal, which is what the Last Supper was; Passover the great feast of deliverance and promise, as the people of Israel were delivered from slavery to the Egyptians.

Jesus did not have to have supernatural insight to realize that betrayal and doubt and despair and denial all hung heavy in the night air. He knew the disciples would say "no" to him. And so he offers this gift: even when you say "no" to me. . . as you eat the bread, remember I am saying "yes" to you. Offering you the bread of forgiveness. The bread of deliverance from your sin and death. Even as you say "no" to me, as you drink the cup, remember I am saying "yes" to you, that my life was poured out for you that your life might be replenished.

Do this in remembrance of me. It's not just a command, a ritualistic duty we must do because Jesus says so.

It's a gift. It's a time for us to remember, that even when we have said "no" to him, he says "yes" to us. Again and again.

Because Jesus trusts that when he has said yes to us enough, yes to new life, yes to forgiveness no matter what we have done, yes to a new future even if our past is so very difficult, like the disciples before us, the time will come when we will say "yes" again to him. Amen.