

Say Amen Somebody
2 Corinthians 1: 18-22

**First Presbyterian Church
Baton Rouge, Louisiana**

**August 13, AD 2018
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Watching the children go back to school all over the city, I've been thinking a lot about first grade this week. All at once, that day was exciting, scary, lonely, interesting. It's so hard to find your place and find your way when everything is new. I've also been thinking about how Nigel Goodson and I became best friends in first grade. He wasn't in my same classroom. Nigel had Mrs. Stepkin for a teacher. She carried a big purse. The rumor was that Mrs. Stepkin's purse was so big she could put a kid inside it. But I never saw proof that actually happened. Nigel and I met during recess. The development of our friendship went something like this:

I like you. Do you like me?

Yes, I like you. Do you want to be my friend?

Yes, I'll be your best friend if you'll be mine.

OK, I'll be your best friend. Do you really like me?

It was the dance of Yes and OK! Of affirmation and acceptance, of offering and confirmation. Hey, I like you. Is that OK? Yes, it's ok. Is it ok if I'm your friend? This choreography goes on throughout our lives. Affirmation and acceptance:

Stopping in the mud from the burst pipe in your water line, a neighbor arrives with a tool to turn off the water main.

Affirmation: It looks like you could use a hand.

Acceptance: *Great! That's wonderful.*

A week after the interview, the phone rings, and the voice says

Affirmation: You have the job.

You can't contain yourself and burst out in Acceptance: *Awesome, I'll take it!*

At the end of the dock, with the sun setting he speaks an Affirmation:

I want to marry you! Two words communicate all the acceptance in the world:
I will!

Yes, God is good.

Amen, all the time.

It's the Yes and the OK. Paul calls it the Yes and the Amen. Amen means, "OK, may it be so, what you said is good with me." Affirmation: I say Yes to you. Acceptance: You say Amen. You tell me my affirmation of you is welcome.

This is what is going on at the heart of our passage today. Paul speaks boldly: God is faithful (vs. 18). He is full out consistent and constant. And so the Son of God, Jesus Christ who came to us, is not Yes and No toward you. He does not vacillate. In Christ, we learn that God is always and has always been Yes toward us. "For all the promises of God find their Yes in Christ" (vs.20). How does God keep his promises to his people? The answer is always "In Jesus." Jesus is the Yes to his Father's promises. He is the vow kept. The hope delivered. Jesus is the affirmation of God the Father toward us. He is God's love made known.

But here's the wild part. Jesus is not only God's affirmation toward us. Jesus is also our reply back to his Father. As a man, Jesus accepted his Father's sovereign Kingship. As the Son of God who became a man, Jesus is God's saying, "I love you." But as the Son of Man, Jesus is also our saying back to God, "I love you too." Jesus is God's Word to man. He is also man's word back to God. Jesus is the man who lived perfect faithfulness toward his Father. He loved his God with all his heart. He loved his neighbor as himself. And he still does. He offers love to his Father and invites us to participate in that glorious relationship. We make our reply to his Father through Jesus. Through Christ we offer our acceptance of God's love. Through Jesus we offer our Amen to what God has done for us.

Let's look at this all summed up and then take the rest of our time to unpack it:

Yes and Amen!
Affirmation and Acceptance.

In Christ is God's Yes.
Through Christ is our Amen.

In Christ, God's Promises are made Yes toward us.
Through Christ, our Amen is made toward God.

All God's promises flow through Christ.
All our offering of ourselves flows through Christ.

We never stand alone. We never create ourselves or make our own way. We are in Christ. We are relocated in him. We are reoriented towards God through his life, death, and resurrection. He is the One who connects God and man in himself. Now let's think through all this means for us.

All the promises of God are Yes in Christ Jesus. I've been wondering about what promises Paul might have had in mind. He would have read these promises in the Hebrew Scriptures, what we call the Old Testament. What great promises of God do we find there?

I love some of the personal promises. Like the one God made to Jacob.

I am with you wherever you go. I will not leave you until I have done that which I have promised you (Genesis 28:15).

Jacob was in the wilderness, a self-centered momma's boy fleeing from the wrath of the brother he had wronged. He had no idea what the future held for him. But in the night, the LORD spoke to him a lifetime promise. I'm not finished with you. You are not lost for I know where you are. Your future may seem dark to you, but to me it is as bright as day. I am with you. I will not leave you.

God said the same thing to Joshua. The young leader was terrified that he had to lead the people into battle against the fortified city of Jericho. But the LORD spoke,

I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law. (Josh 1: 5, 7).

God may set great tasks and challenges before us. But he promises to be with us. His presence is the basis for all our confidence and courage.

And many times, in personal trial or anxiety, I have found such comfort in this promise spoken through Isaiah:

Fear not, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name; you are mine (Is. 43: 1).

God promises that we are personally known to him. That we belong to him. He has called us out of darkness. Looking on us in mercy, he has chosen us to be with him.

I also love the passages where the LORD promises to fix his people from the inside out. He promises a future where our sinful hearts have been transformed to faithful hearts. He promises to restore us to what we were intended to be. Through Moses, God promised

And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart...so that you will love the LORD your God with all your soul, that you may live (Deut. 30: 6).

Through the prophet Ezekiel, God pledged,

I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. I will remove the heart of stone...and I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes...and you shall be my people and I will be your God (Ezekiel 36: 26-28).

He promised to do heart transplants on his people, to give them his own Spirit so they could re-enter a living relationship with him. In Jeremiah the LORD swore,

I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel...I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts...and they shall all know me. I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more (Jer. 31: 31-34).

All of these promises find their fulfillment in Jesus. Jesus brings the new covenant. He establishes the new terms of relationship to the living God. For Jesus kept the law all the rest of us broke. He loved his Father with his whole heart when all the rest of us loved only ourselves best. He loved his neighbor more than he loved himself. He was a new kind of humanity. Man made right. Man in faithful relationship to his Father and to the rest of the world. Jesus took upon himself the promises of God's wrath against sin. He took the promised judgment against us as his own, taking it to the cross. And in his rising from the dead, he was the promise made to Ezekiel that dead bones would live again. Jesus was, and is, man remade, man reborn, man reoriented back to his Father. We see that in Christ Jesus, God is, and always has been, *Yes* towards us.

Now the question arises, how do we get in on this? How do we accept God's great affirmation of us in Christ Jesus? We say Amen to what he has already done. We praise him that our salvation is his work not our work, and we agree to let him do it. Paul writes, "It is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and he has anointed us...and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee." It is the work of

God to relocate us out of ourselves and into Christ. He puts us into Christ and he puts Christ's Spirit into us. The sense of this passage is that God reorients us Christward. He redirects us from looking at ourselves and causes us to look to Jesus. He frees us from the shaky foundation of all the stories we tell ourselves about why we're ok and why we're great and why God should be pleased to have us. He establishes a new foundation for our lives: Jesus who kept all the commandments of God and Jesus who fulfills all the promises of God. We stand on Jesus, not on ourselves. For we live not out of ourselves, but out of Christ.

But it's really even more organic than that. There is the closest personal union between Jesus and the believer. I was so excited to read this week about the wonderful word play Paul uses here. Once you see it, it's so powerful. The word Christ means "anointed one." Israel's kings were anointed with oil to show that they had been chosen by God for kingship. The Messiah, the Christ, was the one the people waited for. He was, literally, the anointed one. But his anointing would be not in oil but in the Spirit of God. God's own Spirit would be upon the Christ to save his people. Jesus, of course, is the Christ. He is the anointed one and God has joined us to Christ. But how? By "*Christing*" us! Paul says God anoints *us* with his Spirit. God puts us in Christ as he "*Christs*" us with his Spirit. He christens us with the Spirit. That's why we are called Christians. Because we share in his anointing. We belong to him because his Spirit is within us.

That's the great gift of our union with Christ. We share the same Spirit with Jesus. And that's the great gift of our unity with each other. We share the same Spirit of Jesus and so we are bound heart to heart and life to life. We are organically the members of Christ's body and he is our head. From the head flows the Spirit who joins us together.

We know only a taste of this communion now. So Paul tells us that the Spirit we feel when we worship and when we fellowship is the down payment of all that is to come. What he has begun in us by relocating us into Christ, he will continue into eternity. One day, the shackles of our old sinful nature will all be gone. In resurrected bodies and with purified hearts, we will know ecstatic communion with the Triune God and one another. We will participate vigorously in the vibrant life of God himself.

This is what God has done in Jesus, his anointed one, our Christ and our savior. He has said a profound and eternal Yes to us. He has declared humanity to be worth his own flesh and blood. He has staked his life on us. And his work in establishing us in Christ does not destroy our choice or our humanity: it makes it

possible. Only God can call sin-sick sinners back to joyful worship. Only God can pay the cost to redeem those enslaved to sin. Only God can raise the spiritually dead to life. He calls us, he redeems us, and he makes us alive in order to make us able to sing out our Amen to all he has done in Christ. He has *Christed* us so that we may be in Christ so that we may join him in his worship of his Father and in his mission to the world.

So does your heart want to say Amen when you hear the promises of God fulfilled in Jesus? Can you join these prayers?

Father, we say Amen to your great Yes to us in Christ!

Father, we say Amen to Jesus who recreated the human heart to be faithful to you again.

Father, we say Amen to Jesus who took the wrath our sin demanded and went to the cross to wash away our iniquities.

Father, we say Amen to Jesus who redeems us and who calls his sheep by name. We say Amen to his claim on our lives. We say Amen to the seal of his ownership.

Father, we say Amen to having your Spirit poured into our hearts. Amen to being united to Jesus. Amen to being joined to his body the church. And Amen to being sent into the world with his gospel. Amen to saying Yes to others in the name of Christ.

Amen to accepting the Yes of the Father through the work of the Son in the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Somebody say Amen!