

*In Christ Alone, Pt. 2*  
***The Great Yes***  
*2 Cor. 1: 20-22, 1 Cor. 1:30*

**First Presbyterian Church  
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We learn the meaning of the word very early in life. “I promise. I promise I’ll be there. I promise I’m your best friend. I promise I’m telling the truth.” You really mean it. And we learn very early on that promises get broken. It hurts. “I promise I’ll be home early and we can have pizza and watch a movie together.” Then the parent has to work late. After waiting and waiting the child goes to bed sad. It’s one of the knives that stabs every parent. And it works both ways. “If you let me go to Hannah’s, I promise I’ll clean my room by noon tomorrow.” Then you don’t, and the look of sadness on a parent’s face at your broken promise just slays you. Keeping promises is one of the marks of a mature, loving character. You do what you say you will. And we will all know how much we fail each other.

The LORD I Am made promises to his people in Scripture. He claims to be the God of his Word. He is full of steadfast love and mercy. Yet, sometimes we read in Scripture that God’s people felt like he had broken his promises. Psalm 89 reminds the LORD of what he said to David, “My steadfast love I will keep for him forever, and my covenant will stand firm for him.” Amidst the rubble and ruin of the exile, however, it felt like God had abandoned them. Just a few verses later we read, “But now you have cast off and rejected...you have renounced the covenant with your servant.”

We can all feel that way. If God is so loving, why is my life so hard? If he’s really going to take care of me, why does he let me go through such suffering? Are his promises empty? His covenants broken? This is where shallow prosperity promises do so much damage to people’s hearts. The church can communicate that if you have enough faith, you can just name and claim the health, wealth and great life you envision. We can send the message that the abundant Christian life is promised to be without suffering. And then when people suffer, which inevitably happens, the fault can lie two places. One, maybe it’s my lack of faith and so I am crushed with a sense of failure. Or two, maybe God just failed me.

Maybe God is all a lie, and so I have an angry crisis of faith. Either way, we can enter a season of just giving up on the whole God thing. What we need is to reset the whole discussion on a deeper level that matches the reality we experience with the truth of who God really is.

In our first passage this morning, Paul writes, “For all the promises of God find their Yes in Christ” (2 Cor. 1:20). One of Paul’s great achievements was to reset all the Hebrew Scriptures into the key of Jesus. He took the promises of God to a deeper level as he showed how everything comes together in Jesus.

In Jesus, we see God keeping promises like these:

*And I will walk among you and will be your God and you shall be my people. (Lev. 26: 12).* God literally came among us when the Son of God became flesh in Jesus.

*Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows (Is. 53:3).*

As one of us, Jesus did not turn from the daily pressure, struggle, sorrow and suffering we all undergo. He embraced it as his own.

*I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jer. 31: 34).*

Jesus went to the cross to atone for our sins and create reconciliation between God and humanity.

*He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces” (Isaiah 25: 8).*

In his resurrection on Easter, Jesus shattered the power of death and opened the way to eternal life.

*And I will give you a new heart...And I will put my Spirit within you. (Ezekiel 36: 26-27)* Now from his Father’s right hand, Jesus pours out his Spirit on us to create faith and unite us to all his saving grace.

Jesus becomes the embodied fulfillment of all God’s promises to his people. He resets the whole meaning of promises made and fulfilled by what he suffers, what he conquers and what he gives us. All the promises of God find their Yes in him.

But there’s another side to Jesus’ promise keeping. One that is just as significant. Jesus keeps the promises that humanity has made to God. He fulfills the faithfulness and obedience required of us.

After Moses read the law and commandments to the people, we all promised,  
*All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient* (Exodus 24: 7).

Moses threw a bowl of blood on the people to confirm the promise, Then, within a few days our ancestors in faith had made the golden calf and bowed down to it. No one ever kept the words of the LORD until Jesus came and obeyed perfectly.

Only Jesus could fulfill the bold prayer of the Psalm:  
*Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book'* (Heb. 10:7 quoting Ps. 40: 8).

In the Garden when all the others had forsaken him or simply gone to sleep on him, Jesus prayed on behalf of all of us to his Father,  
*Yet not what I will, but what you will.* (Mark 14: 36).

Jesus is the meeting place between the promises of God and the faithfulness required of humanity. The people waited for centuries for the LORD to fulfill his Word to them. The LORD waited patiently knowing his people could not ever, on their own, keep his law. The waiting ended in Jesus. He enacted our faithfulness and his Father's promises. So God and humanity meet *in Christ alone*.

My response of prayer to this passage went like this:

Beautiful Jesus, you said Yes to your Father!  
As the Son of God, you accepted the plan  
To visit us as the man Jesus Christ.  
In becoming one of us, you said Yes to humanity.  
You came to bring us back to what we were meant to be.  
All the ancient promises came true in you:  
God dwelt with his people in you!  
And you hold onto our humanity in heaven,  
You keep us joined to you by your Spirit.  
You are constantly the promise kept!  
And you are our Yes back to God!  
Through your faithfulness, we sing our praise.  
Through your prayers, we make our own.  
We find our joy in joining your harmony  
With the Father's will.  
In you, we say Yes!

Now let's turn this one more direction. In our second passage, we read, "And because of God you are *in Christ Jesus*, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption." Because of God you are in Christ. The language is so simple, we can read right past it. It more literally reads "But out of him you are in Christ Jesus." Notice the "out" and "in." *Out of* him, you are *in*. The "him" is God the Father. By his will and action, you and I got put into Christ Jesus. And Jesus is for us all wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption.

Now if it's all in Jesus, we have to get *into* Jesus. That happens only by an act of God. He creates saving faith in us. God enables us to do for ourselves what we cannot do by ourselves: to believe, to yield, to surrender, to trust, to be joined to Jesus.

As we've studied encounters with Jesus this new year, I keep getting led back to significant moments of conversion in my life. Last week I mentioned to you how I came awake to Christ at age 14. After that, I became an on fire Christian. I was obsessive about wanting to be obedient, and before long I fell into the pit of legalism. I had to confess every sin. I had to give a gospel pamphlet to anyone I saw. Most parents worry that their high schoolers are off doing bad things. I overheard my Mom moaning to a friend on the phone, "I don't know what to do! He's not normal. All he does is read his Bible and say his prayers!" The truth for me was that legalism was a crushing load. Trying to be perfect all the time made me want to just give up the faith. A wise counsellor led me to see that I was living by law and not grace. Even though I was trying so hard to be a super Christian, I was full of myself, not Christ. I learned a very important truth: you can't talk yourself out of legalism. It always sounds right to try to do right and demand that of everyone else. You can only be converted out of legalism. It required a new level of surrender from me. To give over my own righteousness and rely wholly on Christ himself. The freedom was awesome. Such a burden lifted. Christ bore my sins so I don't have to. God creates faith in me so I don't have to whomp it up. The Spirit undertakes to make me holy so I can relax into him.

My counsellor directed me to read the book *Abide in Christ* by Andrew Murray. So this passage that you will read in your books this week has been very dear to me for a long time. The freedom and joy it offers can change your life.

"You are in Christ Jesus." The believers at Corinth were still feeble, only babes in Christ. And yet Paul wants them to know distinctly that they are *in* Christ Jesus. The whole Christian life depends on the clear consciousness of

our position in Christ. Most essential to the abiding in Christ is the daily renewal of our faith's assurance, "I am in Christ Jesus."

But the apostle has an additional thought, of almost greater importance: "*Of God* are you in Christ Jesus." He would have us not only remember our union to Christ, but specially that it is *not* our own doing, but the work of God himself. As the Holy Spirit teaches us to realize this, we shall see what a source of assurance and strength it must become to us. It is of God alone that I am in Christ, then to God himself, the Infinite One, becomes my security for all I can need or wish in seeking to abide in Christ. (*Abide in Christ*, Sixth Day)

If I am in Christ, it is because God the Father by the power of the Holy Spirit put me there. He re-located me into Christ. Not by taking away my will. But by enabling my will. His power inspires me to yield my heart which otherwise would remain in stubborn rebellion. So I really do surrender my life to Christ; it is really my act of free will. But the power to have a free will comes from God. He creates faith in me as a gift. "It is of God alone that I am in Christ." Murray encourages us to receive the comfort of this reality. God wants me! God planted me in Christ so that I can grow in him. I did not make this up. It is God's work and it's happening in me!

Meditating on this stunning truth, the prayers I wrote in response went like this:

Of God I am in you, Christ Jesus!  
Out of the Father's pleasure  
Out of the Spirit's power,  
I partake of your very life,  
I receive your redemption,  
I yield to your will and way.  
Oh priceless gift of faith!  
Oh merciful Savior  
Who lets me be joined to you  
And all you accomplished for us.  
Of God I am in Christ.  
I sing all day!  
Of God, of God, of God  
I am in Christ!  
I cannot be snatched away  
I cannot lose him

For I did not make this.  
No, you are making me:  
Of God I am in you, Christ Jesus.

Scripture never promises us a life without suffering. The promises of God's blessings and favor, his protection and care do not preclude difficult days. They don't save us from discomfort or dying. But they take the whole discussion deeper. We are in Christ Jesus. He has come among us. He has walked this path of life on our behalf. He has blazed a trail through death to eternal life. He makes sense of everything.

All the promises of God are Yes in Christ Jesus. Paul adds, "That is why through Christ we utter our Amen to God for his glory." What can we say in response to Jesus our promise keeper? He is God keeping faith with us. He is man keeping faith with God. What can we say to the gift that God has put us into Christ? He has gifted us with locating our lives in Jesus! Only an Amen with all our hearts. I remember when Helen Cato was about five or six, her mother Audra was telling her about Jesus and all he has done for us. Helen had just one reply, "Yes, yes, yes!"