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Doing the Yes

Exodus 17:1-7; Philippians 2:1-13; Matthew 21:23-32

We've got one brother here who says "no" but then does it, and we've got one brother who says "yes" and then doesn't do it.

Why do we say "yes" and then we don't do it? A couple of different kinds: one kind of saying yes and then reneging is the kind where you say yes, but you never really intend to do it. Nah, you just say yes because that's what they want to hear. You don't really mean it, but you say Yes to be liked, accepted, save face, fit in, or get elected. One of the reasons voters can become cynical is we worry that our political candidates are saying Yes to a whole range of things in order to get elected, but then...they don't intend to do it.

“Don’t you think Ms. Silverstein is SUCH a WITCH?” my seventh-grade friends would hiss. I thought Ms. Silverstein was a good disciplinarian and a dedicated teacher who held us to high standards. I said Yes to the witch accusation because I wanted to be liked by my classmates. But I didn’t mean it.

Another kind of saying Yes and then reneging is the kind where you say yes, *and your intentions are good*, but then you just fall down on the job. I mean to be someone who will stand up for justice in this country so that all people can have access to basic healthcare without personal bankruptcy. I preach it, I believe it, my intentions are good.

But what do I ever really do? I don’t know how. I’m weak. I forget. I’m too busy and distracted. I say Yes, but I have lots of excuses.

We don’t know which kind “Yes, but No” this brother was in Jesus’ story. It doesn’t say. He might have said Yes because he wanted his father to think well of him. He might have said Yes to get along and go along. He might have said

Yes because he really, truly did MEAN to do it, but then...he got tired, distracted, busy, or lazy.

This son did not do the will of his father. This son ends up outside the vineyard, outside the action, outside the realm. Out. Just out. Not put out, just never got around to getting there.

And how about the other brother? The rebellious son, who when his father orders him into the vineyard to work for the day, this son says, Forget it. No way. Work? Are you kidding?

In Barbara Kingsolver's novel Animal Dreams, the main character Codi has left her rural town in the southwest to go on to bigger and better things. A physician like her father, Codi had been coaxed by some of the townspeople to come back and serve as the town doctor when her father retires, but she was not going to hear of it. Grace, Arizona was Nowheresville and she was going Somewhere.

Though I won't go into detail, Codi finds herself back in Grace quite against her better senses when her father's health declines. Then she ends up teaching science in the town school. Then she ends up realizing that, though she said No, she's living a Yes.

The chief priests and elders in the Temple at Jerusalem were justifiably irritated at Jesus. At this point in the story, Jesus has just arrived in the capital city. In a rage he drove out the money changers and began insulting the established leadership. He's begun drawing in the riff-raff from the city: the beggars and the children and the ne'er-do-wells. He's begun teaching in the Temple without a license. It would be like someone barging right into church this morning, right this moment, and grabbing a microphone and interrupting our beautiful liturgy and telling us he's here to preach the real Word of God.

"By what authority," they ask Jesus, "are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" I believe that one of the truest and most lasting and powerful

sources of authority is living the Yes, doing the Yes, not just saying Yes and then doing nothing. The Pharisees marveled about Jesus, saying, “He teaches as one having authority”. What did that mean other than he lived the will of his father?

This time of year, many of us are coming back to church, or coming back to our regular lives, or coming back to our usual routines. What are you saying Yes to, and what are you saying No to? What Yes are you living and what Yes have you neglected to do? And if there is any confusion about that, try this:

Look at your feet. The feet, unlike the mind and the tongue, never lie. The feet tell the truth. Where do your feet take you?

The father pulls no punches. The vineyard is work. There will always be a host of excuses not to go there: there's sweat, and worry, and investment, and other people's ideas. The Kingdom of Heaven has a narrow door and the laborers are

few. Sometimes going to the vineyard is a matter of simply being faithful to a call or to a promise that is not fully understandable or clear. Have you ever been to the vineyard that is God's kingdom? It's amazing and wonderful and exhausting and hard. Have you ever been there? Check your shoes.

It's being a "good news" person. It's serving your neighbor.

It's standing up for the outcast. It's letting go of grudges.

It's giving away money. It's praying when you don't know what to say. It's getting together with other people to make a difference in the community. It's seeing the good in an angry person.

Working in the vineyard hurts and it heals, and it changes you and it fills you.

Have you been there? Look at your feet.

A man had two children; he went to the first and said, "Son, go and work in the vineyard today." He answered, "I will not;" but later he changed his mind and

went. He changed his mind. It always involves that. A better translation might be, “but later, *he thought better of it*, and went.”

I was so angry when a big thing I had planned fell through because another person I was counting on to help me backed out. My first instinct was to lash out, let him have it, withdraw my friendship, spread it around to everyone else that he was a quitter and an undependable loser.

But later, *I thought better of it*, and I called him and offered my understanding and support for a difficult decision rendered. I changed my mind, and responded to an earlier call to be gracious, to work in the vineyard of God’s love and understanding. At first, there was NO WAY I was going to do that. But my feet took me elsewhere and the world was the better for it.

Jesus points out the prostitutes and the tax collectors as examples of people who got it. These are the rebels and outcasts, the dropouts and losers, the

shameless and the dishonorable of Jesus' day. We have our own examples of dropouts and losers in our day. They're the ones who have said "[expletive] you!" to God's call to love and grow in the world, and who have rejected the call to blessing.

But having gone down that road, these are usually the same people who, later, *think better of it*, and are the first to stream into the vineyard. Running. Leaping.

They first said No, but now look at their feet!

Beloved of God: Say Yes, and live Yes, and live.