

**Upon This Rock:  
Stone Rolled Away**

**Mark 16:1-8  
I Corinthians 15:1-6  
2 Corinthians 1:18-20**

*Easter is God's YES day.*

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There's a cute children's book called *Yes Day* by Amy Krouse Rosenthal. It's about a day when everything this little kid wants to do is OK. Pizza for breakfast, ice cream, making up games, having friends over, staying up late—every request is met with yes. For him, it's the best day ever.

Sometimes being a parent is a series of negative responses, because we are trying to teach our children, keep them safe, prevent their imprisonment. So we have to say, “No. No this. No that. Not now. Never. Over my dead body.” The thesis of this book is how awesome it would be if every great once in a while, there would be a day where every request got a “Yes.”<sup>1</sup>

Jennifer Garner, the movie actress and credit card spokesperson, has a daughter, and *Yes Day* is her favorite book. So Jennifer got the Hollywood wheels turning and turned out a movie on Netflix last month based on this book. It's a cute family comedy, not great cinema, but worth a watch. It gets much more complicated than the book, because the children are older and more complicated than in the book. But of course, it all works out in the end.<sup>2</sup>

Maybe you find yourself in need of a “Yes Day” today. For the last year, it has been pretty much one “no” after another. The pandemic has been like a grouchy parent: no travelling, no parties, no restaurants, no hugging, no visits to sick relatives or grandchildren. Want to keep your job? No. Want to be treated equally whatever the color of your skin? No. Want to see our democracy function smoothly? No. It's been a long year of “no's.” We need some “yes.”

I'm sure the followers of Jesus were worn out with the negativity of the week before Jesus died. It had started so well

with the royal procession into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. But it quickly turned, as Jesus confronted the hypocrisy of the religious leaders. Then he was betrayed by one of his own disciples. He was arrested, tried in a mockery of justice, condemned to die, brutally beaten half to death, and then crucified until he died. As they buried the body of Jesus on that Friday afternoon, it was as if the universe was telling them “No.” No to love, no to peace, no to hope, no to all the things Jesus had done and said. As if to punctuate the negativity, they rolled a huge stone in front of his tomb.

But the story was all different on Sunday morning. Jesus was raised from the dead! The women came to the tomb, wondering how they were going to remove the stone. But as they approached the tomb, they saw that the stone had been rolled away. They looked inside and saw a young man in white, who told them the amazing news: *“Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him.”*<sup>3</sup> Suddenly God’s “Yes!” began to dawn on them. Jesus was alive. He had risen, as he said.

Paul gave the earliest written record of the resurrection in I Corinthians: *“For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas [Peter], then to the twelve.”*<sup>4</sup> A little later, Paul writes a second letter to Corinth and interprets the resurrection as God’s “Yes” to the world: *“As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been ‘Yes and No.’ For the*

*Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you ... was not 'Yes and No'; but in him it is always 'Yes.' For in him every one of God's promises is a 'Yes.'"*<sup>5</sup> If Jesus is God's "Yes" to the world, then Easter is God's "Yes Day." On this day, like no other day in the year, we know that everything is going to be all right. Everything is ultimately going to be a "Yes."

So maybe you're thinking, what are these promises of God? What does God say "yes" to because of Jesus?

In Christ, God says "yes" to **forgiveness**. The whole point of the death of Jesus was to win for us forgiveness of our sins. Instead of requiring each one of us to atone for our own sins (which we could never do), God laid on God's Son the burden of guilt and shame, the sins of the whole world. Jesus was, as John the Baptist said, "*The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.*"<sup>6</sup> By his sacrificial death, we are free to be forgiven. Paul explains it this way: "*since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*"<sup>7</sup>

So when the church gets started on the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit is poured out on the disciples, just 50 days after Easter, Peter translates this "Yes" of God into an action item: "*Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you.*"<sup>8</sup> In Jesus, God says "yes" to forgiveness.

In Jesus, God says "Yes" to **love**. That's the reason Jesus came to earth: "*For God so loved the world, he gave his only Son.*"<sup>9</sup> Jesus taught that the two most important things are to

love the Lord your God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself. When Jesus wanted to leave the disciples with one last word, he told them to “*love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*”<sup>10</sup> When Jesus died, it looked like the haters had won the day. When Jesus rose from the dead, love won the day. Hatred lost; love rose up in triumph. It always will, because Jesus is God’s “Yes” to love.

In Jesus, God says “Yes” to **life**. Death had been a reality since the beginning. When Adam and Eve chose self-centeredness over obedience to God, death became part of the human experience. When Jesus rose on Easter, God tore through the prison bars of death and set him free. Everyone who believes in him is also set free. Because Jesus was resurrected, we will share with him in his resurrection. Paul says, “*if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.*”<sup>11</sup> We will all die, but when we die, we will go home to a place that has been prepared for us, a life of victory and joy and peace and glory for all eternity. That’s the “yes” of Easter.

And because our lives have that eternal prospect, because we know that heaven is waiting on us, it gives our lives meaning and purpose, right here and now. We never lose hope, because we know how the story ends. Eternal life is already begun, already part of our present life. Jesus called this “abundant life”; he said, “*I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly.*”<sup>12</sup> Jesus is God’s “Yes” to life.

And finally, Jesus is God's "Yes" to **living righteously**. We have received forgiveness; we are surrounded by love; we know life abundant and eternal. These things make a difference in how we live. And how we live makes a difference in the world. Because God has said "Yes," we care how we live. We are caretakers of God's world. We care about the planet God has given us. We care about God's children, each one of them created with dignity and worth, when they are sick or dying or homeless or poor. Because we worship a Savior who was killed by the injustice of the religious authorities and the Romans, we want to stand up when we see injustice in our world today. When people are abused, oppressed, and marginalized, it matters to us because it matters to God.

How we live our lives makes a difference because we can make a difference with our lives. That's the promise of God's "Yes." In I Corinthians, after Paul has spent a whole chapter trying to explain the resurrection, here is the promise he gives: "*Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*"<sup>13</sup> Easter people have a job to do. Love people. Do good. Stand for justice. Because God has said "Yes" to living righteously.

What does this mean for our lives today? I think Max Lucado, the pastor and Christian author, put it so well thirty years ago, and I've never forgotten it. He said Easter means "your failures are not fatal, your death is not final, and your future is not futile."<sup>14</sup> God has said "Yes" to forgiveness, to love, to life abundant and eternal, and to living for righteousness and justice. That's what Easter means.

Now what do we do with it? That's our big question today. If God has said "Yes" to us in Jesus, how now do we say "Yes" to God? What are your next steps on the journey of faith? That's a personal question that only you can answer, because each one of us is at a different place on the journey. But I know this: wherever you are on the path, God has a next step in mind for you. Maybe there is a sin or an addiction or an illness that you need to overcome in your life. Maybe there is a relationship that you need to heal or renew. Maybe you have never made a commitment of your heart to Jesus Christ as Lord. Maybe you've never been baptized. Maybe God is calling you to the next step in your prayer life, in learning, in serving. Maybe God is calling you to engage in ministry to make the world a better place. There are many next steps. Whatever your is, if God is leading you there, it's a good one.

You can even take a next step if you have been walking with God for a long time, because life never stops throwing challenges our way. I've mentioned E. Stanley Jones a number of times. He was a great Methodist evangelist and missionary in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Much of his work was done in India, but he preached and taught all over the world.

In his mid-80's, Jones wrote a book—his 28<sup>th</sup>—that he felt would be the capstone of his witness. It was called *The Unshakable Kingdom and the Unchanging Person*. Of course, it was about Jesus and the Kingdom of God, and with Jones, it was always about the Holy Spirit in our lives. He had just completed an exhausting preaching tour through Japan and an international missionary conference. He was due for some rest. After all, he was 88 years old.

But during the night of December 7, 1971, E. Stanley Jones suffered a debilitating stroke. He couldn't speak or walk or write for a while. His world was shattered. But through this experience he felt called to take one more step in faith. He could still think, and he later wrote,

The most amazing thing that came out of the shattered remnants of that night was this: I could go on. I could still be a witness. Through this shattered situation, I was to write still another book. The text and the texture were clear and breathtaking.

It was to be on the subject of this passage: "The divine 'yes' has at last sounded in him, for in him is the 'yes' that affirms all the promises of God." The title of the book was to be *The Divine Yes*. Now I must say this Divine Yes through the shattering "No" of a stroke. Now I must apply what I have been preaching through the years: that no matter what happens to us, the final result depends on how we take it. Here I was to be called upon to illustrate and apply the Good News, the Divine Yes, in the fact of the bad news life often offers.<sup>15</sup>

E. Stanley Jones took up this last task with his own brand of inspired passion. He learned to speak again so he could dictate his manuscript through a tape recorder, and he eventually wrote his last book, *The Divine Yes*, before he died at his mission in India in 1973. These are the words he left as his last testament: "At last, then, at long last, the Divine Yes has sounded through him. Jesus is the Yes to all of God's promises: that there is a God, a Father lying behind this universe caring for all of creation; that this Father is manifested in the face of Jesus

Christ, for ours is a Christlike God; that humankind can be different, and life can be utterly changed; that our emptiness can become fullness as every recess of our inner and outer lives is invaded and empowered by the Holy Spirit. To all these promises, Jesus Christ is the Divine Yes, and we belong to him.”<sup>16</sup>

We have been living in a season of disturbance. Everything we have known has been upset by the pandemic and other disruptions. This past year has been a long series of “No’s.” But now it’s Easter. A new season is beginning. It’s a season of life and love and joy. It’s a season of new creation, new purpose, new mission, and new witness. It won’t ever be the same again, but built on the foundation of the past and embracing the new reality of the future, it can be better than ever. Michael Adam Beck wrote this week: “As we move toward resurrection season, may we remember that resurrection is about continuity, not replication. Jesus is raised from the dead in his same body, but it is different. New creation describes a radical change of state. The wound-bearing Jesus is the same, but different. May we come out of the lockdown phase of the pandemic the same, but different.”<sup>17</sup>

We are the same people we have always been—a hot mess, most of us. But we are different today, because we have endured. We have heard the Divine Yes in Jesus Christ, and we are different because of it. Easter is God’s Yes Day. Let us celebrate!

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<sup>1</sup> Amy Krouse Rosenthal, illustrated by Tom Lichtenheld, *Yes Day* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> “Yes Day,” a Netflix film, produced by Jennifer Garner *et al.*, directed by Miguel Arteta, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Mark 16:6.

<sup>4</sup> I Corinthians 15:3-5.

<sup>5</sup> 2 Corinthians 1:18-20.

<sup>6</sup> John 1:29.

<sup>7</sup> Romans 3:23-24.

<sup>8</sup> Acts 2:38.

<sup>9</sup> John 3:16.

<sup>10</sup> John 13:34-35.

<sup>11</sup> Romans 6:5.

<sup>12</sup> John 10:10.

<sup>13</sup> I Corinthians 15:58.

<sup>14</sup> Max Lucado, *Six Hours One Friday* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 1989).

<sup>15</sup> E. Stanley Jones, *The Divine Yes* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975), 32.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Adam Beck, “Lessons From A Long Holy Saturday,” *ministrymatters.com.*, March 31st, 2021.