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¹⁵When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." ¹⁷He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. ¹⁸Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go." ¹⁹(He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me."

²⁰Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them; he was the one who had reclined next to Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?" ²¹When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about him?" ²²Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!"

FIRST READING: Isaiah 60:1-3, 19-21

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Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you.

²See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you.

³Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn... The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory.

²⁰Your sun will never set again, and your moon will wane no more; the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your days of sorrow will end.

²¹Then all your people will be righteous and they will possess the land forever. They are the shoot I have planted, the work of my hands, for the display of my splendor.

“Yes”

I don't know that I can honestly say that I noticed it when Mike and I were married. I wasn't able to pay attention to much of what was happening that day. But I did notice it when Joel and Laura got married, and I notice it each time I officiate at weddings or at ceremonies for renewal of vows. There is always a mystical, amazing moment when the couple says their “I do's” to each other. There is a noticeable hush in the congregation. People sit on the edge of their seats. It's palpable...nearly tangible. Everyone is hanging on their words, listening for their “Yes'es”.

Well today we complete our summer sermon series with the 8th of our words which we can use as a practice to enrich our spiritual lives. We've thus far learned “*here*”, “*thanks*”, “*O*”, “*sorry*”, “*help*”, “*please*” and “*why*”. And today, our word is “*Yes*”. (repeat).

Ok, so let's begin with some theological review. Let's talk about the doctrine of justification! Justification is that state of being not simply forgiven of our sins, but being made holy, being put in a perfectly right relationship/in line with God. Justification is a “legal” term, but in carpentry, pieces of wood can be justified to each other when they're at right angles, and in printing, text can be justified along a right or left margin. Justification is about our being perfectly aligned, in a perfectly right relationship with God. And it involves a double “Yes”. The first “Yes” is God's to us, and the second “Yes” is ours to God.

You see, “*In the beginning*” God created the world and all things in it. God saw that it, all of it, was good, perfectly good. God created the human with the intention of us being perfect and in full relationship with him! But God also created us to be free. And we used our freedom for selfish ambition, falling from what we were created to be. Throughout history, we consistently refused the relationship that God tenaciously wanted with us. It's called our human condition. So, when the time was right, God came to unite with us in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. “*Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing!*” and he perfectly loved, taught, welcomed, healed, lifted up, forgave. Even unto his death on the cross, he was perfectly human. And while we are imperfect in our fallen state, he, by virtue of his solidarity/his shared flesh with us, and by virtue of his enormous love has gathered and continues to gather us unto himself to make us perfect IN him.

I've heard it said that it is an "alien perfection", but nevertheless, we are all made perfect by sharing in what Christ did and was, all that He continues to do and be. What belongs to Jesus, belongs to us. (say it with me) "What belongs to Jesus, belongs to us." We, all of us...all humans... are offered a new, perfected, right "position" before God because of Christ. "*He will give to all the faithful his own self for heavenly food.*" It's the position for which we were created. Kathryn Tanner says it this way, "With the Incarnation, God's relationship with us attains perfection, for in Christ, 'humanity has become God's own.'"¹

And that brings us to the second "Yes". OUR "Yes" to God. This happens when we become convicted as to how far we are from the perfection we were created to be, and when we open ourselves to receiving the unconditional, perfecting love of God. It happens when we say "yes", when we say "I do" to the One who is desiring a relationship with us. Every angel is hanging there, listening in God's hushed heavenly sanctuary. They're on the edge of their seats. And that's because everything is about to change. Love has won and our "yes" marks the beginning of a lifelong commitment, to a shared love, a new love. No longer are we at the center of our own universe. The One we love is...and we are devoting our lives to that One when we say "Yes". (*Pause*)

So.... back to where we were....The spiritual life that we've been learning practices to live into more deeply this summer, brothers and sisters, is a "yes" kind of LIFE! (*repeat*) In the last chapter of John, Peter, one of the twelve disciples of Christ, is confronted with a decision for the "yes" kind of LIFE! The scene is a shoreline along the Sea of Galilee, far north of Jerusalem where not so many days earlier, around a charcoal fire, around a charcoal fire, Peter had denied that he'd known Jesus. During the long night, as he tried to remain inconspicuous in the courtyard of the high priest, whenever he was suspected of being affiliated with Jesus, he'd denied the connection. As morning dawned, a rooster crowed, and Peter realized he'd done exactly what Jesus had predicted. Now, days later, the adventure is over and Peter and fellow disciples are back to their old way of living, fishing...and not being very successfully at it.

¹Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity. A Brief Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 9.

They'd not caught any fish the whole night long. But then there is a voice from the shore that tells them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat. A huge school of fish fills their nets. Peter realizes that the voice is the voice of his Lord, the risen Lord, and he impulsively jumps in the water and swims to greet him. There he discovers the charcoal fire, a charcoal fire...of course it reminds him of the night, the awful night. After a breakfast, Jesus invites Peter for a walk during which he asks him if he loves him. Three times he asks him, perhaps once for each of his denials on that awful night! "*Simon son of John, do you love me?*" "*Simon son of John, do you love me?*" "*Simon son of John, do you love me?*" Peter responds with "*Yes, Lord, you know that I do*", but it seems that Jesus doesn't really think his "Yes" is a fully committed or maybe aware "yes". For he does not let it end here. He tells Peter that sometime soon, he will be taken against his will and will be killed. He follows up with the request for Peter to follow him. And Peter, in a childish manner, points to one of the other disciples and evades the question, "What about him?". The reader is left to wonder if Peter will put his money where his mouth is, whether Peter will live into the "yes" he has said. Is his "Yes" a pious shallow one or the "yes" of the groom at the wedding ceremony, a promise for a lifelong commitment, a lifelong commitment to a shared love, a new life, a life to follow Jesus in mission, service, risk, and potential suffering? Is his "yes" one which will lead him to confront his greatest failure? "*If you love me, Peter, feed my sheep.*"

What about it, friends? We love because God first loved us. God has said the first "yes" to us all. And we have said "yes" in return, but have we understood that the spiritual life, the "yes" life, the perfected life, the one perfectly aligned with God, the holy life, is not simply to connect more deeply to God but to our neighbor? In fact, we cannot be more deeply connected to God without being more deeply connected to God's sheep. All of the 7 other practices we've learned, all now culminate in the great love evoked in the word "yes", a love that when we utter it cannot separate God and others, but rather, loves God in others and loves others in God.

The challenges for this come up in big and small ways every day of our lives. This week I had a small experience wherein I had to reckon with my own "yes". I stopped by the Valero in Belton on 190 and Loop 121. There I was confronted by a young woman who was in a very bad

way. She was most definitely high on meth when she was telling me that she'd had a horrible experience during the night. She was quite believable. She told me through her tears that she just wanted to go home, and she needed to use my phone to call for someone to get her. My instinct was to politely decline for my phone has so much of my life's information on it. I offered to call for her, but she insisted she needed to hold it. I know I had some inner fear that she might harm it or something and I'm sure I also had some deep internal condescension going on too. For a moment very torn, but I could hear God whispering in my head, "Naomi, you said, 'Yes', and she is one of my sheep!" Well, I did give her my phone. But my worries intensified as I watched her fingers working fast, not calling a number but instead adding her account to my phone's Facebook messenger so that she could then access her friends! I was reaching for my phone back when a Belton police officer turned up and assured me that she could delete her account after she was done. I do not know exactly how the situation resolved since I did leave after she reached her brother. But most people had been abruptly hanging up on her. I could hear them doing it, and I found myself really beginning to feel sorry for her. I felt my fear melting into compassion as her panic increased. I guess that's how it is when we get to know the OTHER. And you know, the challenges I was to face for the day ahead were all put into perspective after that too. Again, that's how it is when we begin to get a glimpse of the Other's world. My love for Jesus, resulted in me feeding his sheep and then he adjusted my glasses somewhat. I'm grateful he helped me trust him.

Brian McLaren, the one whose book has guided us through our summer study beautifully states that when HE listens into the silence like a child listening into a seashell, he hears God's voice calling him into adventure and life, 'Follow me, imitate me, learn from me, dance with me, work with me, join me,' "And Brian says he realizes that this is what life is: joining the Life in being alive. This is what death will also be, joining the living God who removes the sting from death and makes death disappear into life: joining God in a reality we have not yet seen or even imagined."²

² Brian McLaren. Naked Spirituality. A life with God in 12 Simple Words. (New York: HarperOne; 2011), 218

So, brothers and sisters, perhaps this week, we can begin the spiritual practice of listening, as we shut our eyes at night or open them in the morning or rest them at noon, listening to our own “yes’es”. We can listen, as we breathe in and out, to our answers to the One who has desired a relationship with us so much, who has said “yes” to us so profoundly in the birth, life, death, resurrection and presence of the living Christ. We can listen to ours yes’s and then offer some more... reaffirming our shared love, our promises to the lifelong commitment of joining in God’s mission, and to joining with our full presence in God’s presence in this world.

Yes. O Come Let adore Him, Christ the Lord. Amen!

Go out into the world in peace. Have courage. Hold onto what is good. Return no one evil for evil. Strengthen the fainthearted, support the weak, help the suffering. Honor all people, Love and serve the Lord.