

Say “Yes” to Jesus.

St Philip’s Anglican Church, O’Connor
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Fourth Sunday of Advent—21 December 2014

Luke 1.26-38

Just imagine you are 18 years old. You have dressed yourself in your best clothes. You have done your hair, brushed your teeth and put on the right smells. You are off to a dance party where there will be lots of friends and acquaintances. There will also be people you have not yet met. You make your way to the event hoping that you will meet Mr. or Mrs. Right. You have been looking forward to this evening for weeks—preparing, dreaming, wondering and hoping. So there you are sitting on a chair watching the dancers, wishing you could join in, wishing that special somebody would come over and invite you to dance. This wonderfully good-looking, charismatic, intriguing person comes up, puts out their hand and says, “Will you dance with me?” What do you do? What do you say? Hold that thought!

These last few weeks I have been preaching about how we can use this time as we wait for the coming of Jesus Christ, a coming that has happened, will happen and is always happening. Advent is about being awake and ready. It is about clearing the highways and byways of our hearts and minds so we can welcome God into our lives. Last week I spoke of Paul’s seemingly impossible suggestion to ‘rejoice always, pray without ceasing and in everything to give thanks.’ But there is one more really important thing we have to do. Unless we do this one thing then all the other preparations will be for nothing. We might as well go home, take off the nice clothes and shelve our dreams and hopes. In fact this one thing stands alone. We can do it without any other preparation. It is the essential, non-negotiable component. What we need to do is say, “Yes.” When it is obvious that Christ is before us and holding out his hand we need to step up to the mark and say a resounding, “Yes.”

That is Mary’s great example. Not that it was Christ before her, although perhaps in a way it was. What is before Mary is the Angel Gabriel who seems to be making a habit of announcing miraculous births. Six months ago Gabriel visited Elizabeth in a similar fashion but whereas Elizabeth was told she would bear a son who would ‘prepare the people’, Mary is told she would bear a son who was the ‘Son of the Most High’. He would be the one John proclaimed. Mary hears this but is not sure if it is good news or bad news. To a young Jewish girl it no doubt sounded outrageous and confusing but despite her reservations her response was immortal. She said “Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word”. She said, “Yes.”

Mary could not have known fully what she was saying ‘Yes’ to—and indeed the story did not turn out quite as she would have hoped. Her beloved son was in the end executed as a common criminal. But her extraordinary faith, hope and obedience shone through even in the fear, the doubt and the reality. We have her beautiful response to Elizabeth when she pays her a visit: “My soul doth magnify the Lord”. Her ‘Yes’ to God was a yes to an amazing promise.

This is what we need to remember when we are sitting there debating whether we will stand up for the dance God invites us to. We need to remember that God is promising some pretty amazing things—reconciliation, peace, justice, unconditional grace-filled love. These promises are not just for our personal satisfaction and enjoyment. They are for the whole world, for all people, particularly those who hunger, who thirst, who are imprisoned and who struggle and suffer. When Mary tells of the great things God has done for her, in the same breath she tells of the great things God has done for others. The blessing of God, God’s grace filled love, is so amazing, I personally cannot understand why every man, woman and child is

not jumping up and down for joy.

Why is it that we do not see this love for what it is? Why is it that this promise is lost in the quagmire of human hopes and dreams? How does it get so lost in the morass of doubts and debate? I don't know really. Perhaps we get waylaid, frightened and confused. We also seem to be very prone to choosing the complete opposite to God's love.

In Greek mythology there is a minor god called Thanatos—the god of death. Thanatos is the son of darkness and night. He is merciless and indiscriminate and hates mortals and deathless gods. Freud used this figure of death to describe what he believed were two fundamental choices human beings make. They choose either Eros, the life instinct, or Thanatos, the death instinct. Thanatos allegedly compels humans to engage in risky and self-destructive acts that could lead to their own death—you know, things like bungee jumping, parachuting, white water rafting and shopping at 9.00 pm on Christmas Eve. Included in Freud's list is also aggression and violence.

It is obvious that acts of violence and aggression could lead to the death of the person since self-defense and revenge are part of the human make-up. If we look around at our world it seems there are whole groups of people enthralled with Thanatos, who have chosen darkness over love and life.

It has been deeply disturbing over the last year and particularly the last week to hear of the terrible deaths of innocent people in attacks by deranged individuals and political terrorists. There has been our own tragedy in Martin Place, Sydney, the horrific murders of children in Cairns and the mind-bogglingly cruelty and insanity of the murder of innocent school children in Pakistan. This is Thanatos reigning supreme. There is no Eros, no love, no life in this way of looking and being in the world. It seems inconceivable that rational, intelligent human beings would choose this reality but they do over and over again. Not just in Pakistan and the Middle East but all around the world in various places and ways. Leaders, commanders and whole communities choose Thanatos; they choose death.

One of the many reasons I love the church community despite its imperfections, one reason I love you guys, is that in this place we choose life. Every act of worship we make is a choice for love and light. Every time we show up to hear the Word of God and join in communion with each other we are choosing reconciliation and peace. Of course we get it wrong sometimes, we are certainly not perfect, we struggle, we make some stupid decisions, we grieve and suffer terrible loss in our lives but we keep choosing God, not Thanatos.

It is not surprising that one of the strongest images we have for Jesus Christ is of light, the light shining in the darkness, a light that the darkness can never overcome. The message of Jesus is that God is love, in whom there is no darkness at all. This is the message of Mary as well and it is the message to which she says a resounding "Yes." "Yes" to love. "Yes" to life. "Yes" to light. "Yes" to justice. "Yes" to peace. "Yes" to hope. "Yes, yes, yes." When Jesus comes and holds out his hand, stand up and say, "Yes." "Here am I, the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me according to your word". Whatever that leads us to, whatever we must face, that is the response, the choice that ultimately brings love and peace to our world. Say "Yes" to Jesus. Amen.