

God Said “Yes”

Luke 24:36-53

By

Joey Novak, Ph. D. Candidate

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San Marino Community Church
1750 Virginia Road
San Marino, CA 91108
(626) 282-4181 • Fax: (626) 282-4185
www.smccpby.com • smcc@smccpby.com

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To the extent possible, effort has been made to preserve the quality of the spoken word in this written adaptation.

If our text this morning was to be made into a play I should think that it would have three acts and a prologue. Since this is my imagination, I also picture the presence of a small orchestra, providing a subtle soundtrack to the story.

So picture with me entering into an old playhouse whose stage is scuffed with the many shoe marks of its actors throughout history. Enter the theatre and take your seat, push down the bottom cushion of the spring-loaded chair, and gaze at the stage.

I imagine that once the audience has gathered, the lights dim, and the small stand lights in the orchestra pit softly click on, partially illuminating the faces and the instruments of the players there. The conductor appears from the pit entrance and approaches the small, raised platform before the players. He looks at them, raises his baton, takes a deep breath and cues the string and woodwind sections.

The audience glances at their programs: The first part of our play is a brief prologue, the necessary information for understanding the rest of the play. Two characters tell the prologue in two monologues: The first is Father Abraham, who tells his story over the soft music:

Once, the Lord whispered to me and gave me a promise. The Lord told me that one day he would give to my descendants a land where they might flourish and where they might dwell in peace and safety. In this land, this Promised Land, the Lord himself would also dwell, giving life and peace to his people. And because the Lord would be present in this Promised Land, all the nations of the world would be blessed. This is the promise of the Lord, given to me, Abraham.

The music swells for a few measures then gently subsides as the next actor, posing as the ancient prophet Elisha, tells his story:

Once, when I served the prophet Elijah, we walked to the banks of the Jordan River. Elijah took off his outer robe, and grasping one end of it, he struck the surface of the water. Immediately, the flowing waters of the Jordan parted before us, and we walked across on dry ground. We walked for a mile or so when, suddenly, I looked at Elijah who was surrounded by what looked like a chariot wrought out of fire, pulled by two horses bred by flames. And Elijah was separated from me and he was carried to heaven on the whirling wings of the wind. The outer robe, with which Elijah had parted the waters, tumbled from the sky to the ground in the chaotic whirlwind and I, with trembling hands, picked it up. I went back to the Jordan River, now flowing normally, and struck it just like Elijah had done. And just like for Elijah, the waters parted before me. And everyone who saw me declared that the Spirit of Elijah now rested on me. Indeed, when I, Elisha, put on Elijah’s outer robe, I was clothed with power from the Lord. This is the power of the Lord, which rested on me, Elisha.

With this, the two actors depart the stage, and the music slowly fades, dissolving to silence, the lights fading to blackness. The audience is stilled and focused. The players quietly assemble in their places as the stagehands hurriedly change the set to reflect an enclosed room with a single door.

In Act One, the stage lights come on full, the curtain is raised and suddenly the audience is overwhelmed with the tidal wave of excited voices. Two dozen people are having two three dozen conversations.

The current of voices swells for several minutes, the cacophonous waves of sound rise and threaten to capsizize the room. The audience is stranded in this perfect storm of conversation, only able to distinguish words like “Jesus”, “resurrection”, and “appearance.”

Suddenly, the audience notices a mysterious figure clad in white standing in the middle of the other characters. He speaks over the tumultuous flood of discussion and says, "Peace be with you!" Immediately, the storm of conversation is stilled. All attention is on the figure in white. The silence is so thick that a feather scratching a piece of felt would have shattered an eardrum. The disciples are frozen. The look on their faces is one of sheer panic.

It is Jesus. Or is it? Jesus, who had been put to death. But, is it the same Jesus? Jesus who had been buried in the earth. Yet is it the same Jesus?
Or is it a spirit? A ghost?

This could not be Jesus. It must be some vague resemblance of the person they once knew, twisted by the afterlife into a phantom. The excitement and joy melts quickly into fear and trepidation.

Their fear of the underworld and its spirits occupies the minds of the disciples. Rational thought gives way to irrational speculation and anxiety. Doubt reigns in the kingdom of their hearts.

And Jesus speaks again:

Why are you so frightened? Why have you let doubts rule your hearts?
Look at my hands and my feet. I AM MYSELF! I AM ME! Touch me,
grip my arms, grasp onto my hands; a ghost does not have flesh and
bone, like you see that I have!

And they look at his hands and they look at his feet, and their doubts begin to fade. Their mistrust of the tangibility of Jesus' body is soothed into a realization that Jesus' body is real. They are stunned. "They were disbelieving for joy!" Like parents who are handed their screaming and squirming newborn child and who come face-to-face with the sheer magnitude of a new life, the disciples are filled with a joyful disbelief.

As final proof that he is indeed not a phantom, or a figment of their imagination, Jesus asks them: "Do you have anything here to eat?" He is given a piece of fish, which he takes and eats in front of them.

Their deep-seated doubts dissipate. Their fear of phantoms fades. Indeed this **is** Jesus in his flesh, and not a ghost. On stage, the disciples marvel at what they are seeing. All eyes are on Jesus.

Act Two begins immediately. The stage lights dim and a spotlight shine on the figure of Jesus. The room is filled with one sound, and one sound alone. The sound of chewing. The resurrected Jesus methodically eats his piece of fish one bite at a time until it is gone. The disciples watch, transfixed on the utter unimaginable scene unfolding.

After the last bite, Jesus looks at his disciples and begins a two-part monologue, what will become his farewell address in Luke’s gospel. First he clarifies the past:

This is what I was trying to tell you before my death! I was trying to tell you that everything in the Scriptures—everything about me that Moses said in the Law, everything about me that the prophets proclaimed, everything about me that the psalmists sang—everything about me must be fulfilled.

Then Jesus pauses and looks at the disciples, whose confused portraits indicate that they are still struggling to wrap their minds around the present situation.

The conductor cues the orchestra, and the music pulses to an even rhythm. The audience knows something important is about to happen. The audience looks at Jesus who is looking intently at the disciples and as he does so, his very gaze reanimates their dead and decaying intellects. We cannot see what happens, next, for who can adequately portray the feeling of having ones’ mind opened? There is no way to adequately describe the ineffable quality of an epiphany. What words can define such a miracle? What gestures? This is one of those lightning-strike moments of realization after which one must radically rethink everything that has happened up to that point. This is a Rosetta Stone moment, where the ancient and puzzling language of the divine will is made available in a common language.

Jesus opens the minds of the disciples, flooding their intellect and will with the dazzling light of his identity. Jesus causes them to understand the story of the Old Testament in a new light: the new light of his death and resurrection. Things fall into place, prophecies make more sense, and the story of the people of God has a new climax now.

Jesus continues:

Now you are able to see that the Christ, the anointed one of God, must suffer and be raised from the dead. Now you see that the message of repentance and forgiveness that comes by me alone must be proclaimed to every nation, starting from Jerusalem. Because you see these things, because you have touched it, because you have experienced it, you now are witnesses to them. You must bear witness to them.

Jesus pauses, preparing to conclude his farewell speech with two strange remarks. First, Jesus says, "Behold! I am sending the promise of the Father upon you!" From offstage, the audience can hear the faint echo of Father Abraham and the retelling his story. We hear the distant voice of Abraham saying, "The Promise of the Lord...."

These stories are linked now. The disciples get it. They get it because their minds are now open. They understand that the death and resurrection of Jesus changed everything. It fulfilled the old promises in new ways, carved new laws into the old stone tablets; it reinvigorated antiquated hopes and dreams.

The promise of the Father was no longer a geographical location where God would dwell and the people would flourish. The promise of the Lord is the presence of God's presence in and among the hearts and lives of his people. Jesus essentially reminds us that God's ultimate aim and promise was to be present among his people, to live with us, to empower and motivate us to love and serve him; he will be our God, we will be his people. And so, Jesus says, "the promise of the father...not the land, but his very presence is coming to dwell among you all." We call this presence the Holy Spirit, the promise of the presence of God in the lives of believers as we assemble together as the Church of Christ. Through this promise, through this Holy Spirit, we are summoned once again to bless all the nations of the world.

Jesus continues with his final remark, "You will be clothed with power from on high!" And the audience hears Elisha's voice from off-stage crying out, "Clothed with the power of the Lord."

These stories are linked now. Jesus is the new Elijah; the disciples are the new Elisha. Like Elisha, they must wait for his outer robe to fall from heaven. Like Elisha, power

from on high would descend on them and all people would say, "The Spirit of Jesus rests on these people!" Like Elisha, the disciples would continue the work that Jesus began, and their ministry would be one of constant witness to the power of the resurrected Jesus. Throughout the Scriptures, the Church is called the body of Christ: We are the tangible presence of Jesus and we are tasked with continuing his ministry of mercy, justice and redemption. Jesus promised that we would be filled with power to do strange and wonderful things like praying for our enemies, for feeding the stranger, for clothing the naked, for opening our arms to all those whom the world ignores, despises, jails, or deports. We will be clothed with power from on high, like Elisha.

Hearing these things, the disciples freeze in their postures of curiosity and intrigue as the lights fade to black and as the music resolves to silence. The curtain falls.

Act Three. And now we have come to it, the end of this story, and the concluding and climactic act of our three-act play.

The final act opens on a mountainside east of Jerusalem. Powerful things happen on mountains in the Bible. God reveals his presence to his people on a mountain. Moses receives the Law of God on a mountain. From a mountain, Moses surveys the Promised Land. In the New Testament, Mary visits Elizabeth on a mountainside town and experiences confirmation of the divine nature of her baby.

A demon-possessed man is clothed and brought into his right mind by Jesus on a mountain. Jesus is transfigured on a mountain, over five thousand people are fed on a mountain, Jesus weeps and sweats blood in a mountaintop garden; and here, as the lights are raised and the curtain opens, Jesus is on a mountain again. And he blesses his disciples.

Jesus, to the rhythm of the joyful music coming from the orchestra pit, lifts his hands in a traditional priestly blessing.

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you.

The Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon you and give you peace.

And even as he is blessing the disciples, Jesus gazes into heaven, looking as if he hears the voice of God, the Father Almighty, calling to him, saying one word to him, the one word which the Father has always said to Jesus: "Yes."

Yes to his incarnation, so that God himself might be revealed in human flesh.
Yes to his obedience, so that he might secure redemption for the entire world.
Yes to his choice of followers, so that they might be the New Israel.
Yes to his partnership with the poor, so that they might find their way to the Kingdom.
Yes to his miracles, so that the sick and wounded might be cured and restored.
Yes, even to his death, so that our debts are paid.
And then a triumphant Yes to his dead body, raising it to new life so that the grip of death might be pried from our throats and handcuffed forever to the side of the prince of Life.

And here, outside a hillside town, that sacred word is uttered again, "Yes."

Yes to Jesus. Yes to his restored flesh. Yes to his resurrected humanity. Yes to Jesus, Son of God, Son of Man. Yes.

And with that, the realm of heaven and the realm of earth touch for a brief moment and Jesus is separated from his disciples. And the music builds, the dull roar of the timpani, the rainstorm-like flood of the piano, the sweeping and swooping strings translating into music the might and power of this scene.

Like Elijah of old, Jesus is carried to heaven. Jesus ascended to heaven in his flesh, with his body. This is our greatest hope. This is the Gospel in this passage. Jesus ascended and was given dominion over all things, and he has a tangible, touchable, "look-at-my-hands-and-feet-able", 'give-me-something-to-eat-able' body. Because "he rose again from the dead and he ascended to heaven where he sits on the right hand of God, the Father Almighty", we now have an eternal pledge on the confession: "I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting."¹

A yes to Jesus was a yes to the future of humanity. In the flesh. God said "Yes".
Yes to Jesus and, thus he will say Yes to us.

Epilogue: On stage, the disciples fall on their faces, weeping with joy. If they could

¹ The Apostles' Creed from *The Book of Confessions*, Presbyterian Church USA, The Office of the General Assembly, pg 7

have, perhaps they would have sung these ancient words:

Crown Him the Lord of love, behold His hands and side,
Those wounds, yet visible above, in beauty glorified.
No angel in the sky can fully bear that sight,
But downward bends his burning eye at mysteries so bright.

Once Jesus has vanished from their sight the disciples run off-stage, where presumably, they return to Jerusalem. There, they wait for the promise of the Father. They wait for the outer robe of Elijah.

They wait for the presence of God to be made manifest to all the nations of the earth. And they worship God together, blessing God's name always.

And the curtain falls. And the house lights rise. And the audience departs, filled with joy because they have heard the good news. God said, "Yes" to Jesus, he said "yes" his body. God said, "Yes" to the stuff of humanity. To our very flesh. God said "Yes". Thanks be to God.

Amen.

Unless otherwise noted, biblical references are to the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the Bible, copyright 1946, 1952, 1971 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.