

**The Power of Dreams: *Hearing Yes in a World of No***  
Biblical Text: Acts 5:27-42

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We live in a world that is full of negativity. And there's plenty of negative data to go around. The economy, terrorism, the market, tax rates, health care costs, gas prices, Social Security, the declining influence of religion on our culture. It's hard to avoid bad news.

In a climate of negativity, blame abounds, and forward movement is difficult. That's true in every human institution. It's true not only in politics, but also in our workplaces, communities, marriages, relationships and families, and sometimes in our own attitudes.

It's worth considering that negativity, unchecked, can stand between us and the life God has promised. **But, it's not the only option!**

Let me illustrate. Last Saturday, we said goodbye to my youngest son's final vehicle from our garage, his old pickup. Ann tried to tell me that we were fortunate to just be moving one of his car restoration projects to Kansas City from Wichita, because at one time two of his vehicles lived in our driveway and garage. That was a nice positive spin. But it didn't work!

John lives in Alaska, and his car and truck lived in Kansas. Between here and Alaska is a lot of real estate. There also was eight years between his vehicles and them leaving my garage!

So, I was not unhappy to see the last one go. I got up early to meet the buyer at 8am, who didn't show up until 10. And then I spent the next few hours listening to try to haggle the price down, from what he agreed to, before finally loading it up and driving away. I was in a grumpy mood all day. Ann can tell you.

I wasted the rest of the day, not to mention several other days over the eight years before, with grumpiness and negativity. And you know what? It was wasted time. Finally I let it go. But you know what? I will never retrieve the time I wasted.

I tell you that for two reasons. First, I suppose, is to assure you that negative attitudes come to live in the most positive among us.

Second, to tell you that we can make other and better choices than to invest our energy there. I needed this message this week!

**And most of us need this message too.**

B.J. Gallagher wrote a book a few years ago that I recommend, *“Yes Lives in the Land of No.”*<sup>1</sup> She suggests that every initial “no” is a prelude to the possibility of “yes” - if we will not give in or give up on situations or people. Her ideas are not new.

My mother’s generation drew strength from the writings of Norman Vincent Peale, and later the writings of Robert Schuller. Whether it is Peale’s *“The Power of Positive Thinking”* or Schuller’s *“Possibility Thinking”* they helped millions of people not give up or give in.

This idea is also found in the world of art and literature. When I was still in high school, I encountered the poetry of e.e.cummings. I found his poetry intriguing, because of its lack of capitalization and punctuation, and sentence structure, and syntax.

I tried to convince my English teacher, Mrs. Ashley, that I should write that way too. It didn’t work. She told me that when e.e. cummings, did so it was for the sake of art, and when I did so, it was for the sake of laziness. She of course, was right.

I learned that e.e. cummings’ poetry is not remarkable and enduring because of his literary device, but because his poetry expresses God’s unstoppable goodness in a harsh and ugly world.

This poem of his is relevant today.

***yes is a world  
and in this world of  
yes live (skillfully curled)  
all worlds  
out of the lie of no  
rises a truth of yes***<sup>2</sup>

I wonder if we can learn to believe that to be true today?

Can we find our way to positive outcomes from negative situations? Can we believe that out of the lie of no can rise a truth of yes?

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<sup>1</sup> “Yes Lives in the Land of No” by B.J. Gallagher and Steve Ventura. Copyright © 2006, Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, e.e. cummings: Complete Poems 1904-1962.

It is a question that is deeply rooted in the Bible and God's Word for us today. **Open your Bibles to our text from Acts 5:27-42.**

Over the last couple of months, we've been working through the history of the early Church. But it is more than that.

It is the story of the early Christians, the followers of Jesus, coming to terms with what was often a negative and hostile world. It is the story of the triumph of faith for people that struggle with challenges and problems, discouragement and negativity.

Over and over again, when the early Christians thought they could not, God spoke a word to their hearts that said, ***"You can!"***

The early Church was surrounded by people deemed unwelcome, unacceptable - but God's word said: ***"You belong to me!"***

Over and over again the early Christians heard the authorities tell them to be silent, and obedient to them. But God reminded them that Jesus had a prior claim on their lives as he said, ***"Follow me!"***

They faced persecution, and rejection that might have caused us to throw in the towel, but they heard God say, ***"Don't give up!"***

They often felt all alone and afraid, but Jesus' words came to them, ***"I will not leave you nor forsake you."***

And in their most discouraged times, when their strength wore thin, God reminded them, ***"I am with you always!"***

In our text today, in Acts 5:29, as the apostles faced anger and rejection, they boldly said, ***"We must obey God rather than men."***<sup>3</sup>

Acts 5:33 says: ***"When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death."***<sup>4</sup>

**But just then an amazing thing happened.**

A respected Pharisee, Gamaliel, a member of the Sanhedrin, stood up to speak on their behalf. And his speech was persuasive and powerful. It was God's divine "yes" in a world of "no."

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<sup>3</sup> Acts 5:29. *New International Version*, Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by Biblica.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Acts 5:33. *New International Version*.

Listen to his words: **“Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.”**<sup>5</sup>

The early Christians did not get off easy; they suffered punishment and public ridicule. But look at their response, even after their suffering, in Acts 5:42: **“Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.”**<sup>6</sup>

E. Stanley Jones learned the same lesson. For more than sixty years, he served as a Methodist missionary and evangelist. He preached sixty thousand sermons. He wrote many books, two of which sold a million copies. His ministry took him around the world many times.

Yet even with those credentials and accomplishments, after a stroke, when he knew he was dying, he found the energy to write one last book. His last and greatest work was entitled, The Divine Yes! It is based on this verse about Jesus from 2 Corinthians 1:20, **“For all the promises of God find their Yes in him!”**<sup>7</sup>

In it he assures the reader that Jesus adds a “plus” to every experience of our lives by his power and presence. In our pain, he adds meaning and redeems it for good. In every challenge, he gives us the means to not only survive, but thrive. To every strength, he adds purpose and blessing. In every end, a new beginning in him.

Our world today, and our Christian lives are not so different from the world the early Christians faced. All around us people are overcome by worries about our future.

Imagine what could happen if God’s people learned to say “yes” in a world of “no?” What if we refused to participate in a culture of negativity? What if we had enough faith to trust, really trust, in God?

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. Acts 5:38-39. *New International Version.*

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. Acts 5:42, *New international Version.*

<sup>7</sup> 2 Corinthians 1:20, English Standard Version. Copyright © 2001 Crossway Bibles, Good News Publishers.

Bishop Porter Taylor defines the essence of what faith means this way:  
***“Faith is saying yes in a world of no.”***<sup>8</sup>

How about your faith? When the world says “No,” will you believe in God, trust in Christ, and let Him open your life to His divine “Yes?”

When the world says, “No, you can’t,”  
believe that God says, ***“Yes, you can!”***

When the world says you are unacceptable,  
believe that God says, ***“You belong to me!”***

When the world pulls you away from your faith,  
remember that God says, ***“Follow me!”***

When the world says, “throw in the towel,”  
trust in God who says, ***“Don’t give up!”***

When you feel alone, and afraid,  
remember that God says, ***“I will not leave you nor forsake you.”***

Even in your most discouraged times,  
believe in God who says, ***“I am with you always!”***

When all around you says, “No,”  
trust in God who says, ***“Yes!”***

Let us pray.

O God, may the words of the late Dag Hammarskjöld be ours:  
***“For all that has been, thanks. For all that will be, yes.”***<sup>9</sup> Amen.

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<sup>8</sup> *“Saying Yes in a World of No”* by G. Porter Taylor, Copyright © 2005, Church Publishing, Inc.

<sup>9</sup> *Markings* by Dag Hammarskjöld, translated by Leif Sjöberg & W. H. Auden, foreword by W. H. Auden. Swedish title: *Vagmarken*. Copyright © 1966, Knopf Press: New York.