

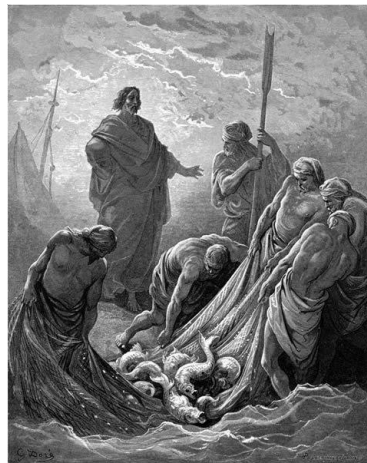
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# Sermons

from The Church of the Covenant

“The Year of ‘Yes’”

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## Luke 5:1-11

*Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.*

*This is the Word of the Lord*

*Thanks be to God*

## ***The Year of 'Yes'***

*"God's overabundant grace can ruin your old life. Let it be so." – Steve Garnaas-Holmes*

Today we read two stories of people being called by God. To most professional ministers, the concept of a calling is a very familiar one. People are always asking pastors the story of our call to ministry. Sometimes these stories are wild and overwhelming like Isaiah's vision of God in the Temple. Sometimes they are marked by everyday miracles like the fishermen meeting Jesus at the seaside. Most of us who are not professional ministers may not think about our calling very much, but the fact is every one of us is called to something – or many things – throughout our lifetime. Whatever form it takes, there is one thing that is constant in these stories:

Ordinary human lives, radically altered by an encounter with the Divine. These are the places where we witness God's overabundant grace at work. It is messy, terrifying, inconvenient, impossible to escape, difficult to contain. The most fascinating thing about these stories is the moment, in every story of call, when one makes the decision to answer that call, to follow. You can almost watch the decision happening. Despite their plans, and in the face of their doubts, someone chooses to say "Yes. Yes. I'll go. Send me."

"Yes"

It's a tiny, simple, word.

But it can turn our whole lives upside down.

Saying yes can mean putting ourselves in danger

Saying yes can mean suffering or heartache

Saying yes can mean that we have to leave all that we've ever known behind

It can also transform us completely, and bless us in ways we cannot imagine

Today we are in the midst of a new call story – our call story. Our community of faith is on the brink of something unknown and new. God's divine presence is radically molding our plans, our doubts, our fears.

Beth L. Tanner once wrote, "Those that have been called by God to a task know very well that there is usually only one answer -- whether that call is to pastor a

congregation or parent a child. The call was decided in our very creation. We can resist, but:

We will not be whole until we answer God

and become who we are created to be,

do what we are created to do.”

These days, Janine is known far and wide as the lady with the farm, the woman who can nurture any living thing – child, seedling, cub, or calf – to happy, thriving maturity. This is who she is at the center of her being – who she was created to be. But she didn’t always know that.

When Janine was 39 years old, she and her partner Mark had successful careers in the city. Janine had always wanted a family, but they had both resisted the idea of marriage and kids as they pursued other passions. Now, at nearly 40, Janine and Mark figured parenthood just might not be in the cards for them. Work kept them both busy and fulfilled. They had a home they loved, friends they cherished, and a life that was stable. It was more than enough.

As Janine moved through her 39th year of life, she banished all thoughts of motherhood and children from her mind and began to look to the future.

Sometimes in order to become who we are created to be, we must first strip away some of who we are. As human creatures, our plans often go awry, or our deepest hopes feel as though they might never be realized. It is often at exactly these moments when we begin to discover what God created us to do.

Peter and his friends were created to be much more than simple fishermen.

These first Apostles could not have seen in their wildest dreams all that God had in store for them. That early morning, as Peter and his partners sat cleaning their nets on the beach, the last thing they could imagine doing was heading back out into the sea. They probably just wanted to go home, and forget that this wasted night had ever happened. When Jesus showed up, urging them to head back out into the deep, they had a choice to make: stay or go; resist or dive in. To say yes seemed completely counter-intuitive. They had spent all night out there, and besides, they weren't prepared. They had just finished cleaning their nets. Jesus knew all of this. He knew they weren't prepared, he knew they were tired, and had been out all night; still, he encouraged them out into deeper, unknown waters. He encouraged them to let go, and move out in faith.

On the night before her 40th birthday, Janine made a promise to herself. She would begin this next year, and the start of a new decade with the word, "Yes." For the next year, whatever opportunity or challenge the Universe sent her way, she wouldn't try to resist or control, she would just roll with it.

The next day, a notice at work caught Janine's eye. County Foster Care needed families to house kids. Was anyone interested in attending the training?

"Yes, I'll do it," Janine said.

In a few weeks, Janine and Mark got word that they were certified foster care providers. That same day, the phone rang. "We have a family of three kids that need placement tonight. Can you do it?"

"Yes"

They hadn't made up any beds. They hadn't even bought groceries. That night, the children arrived: two boys and a girl, ages 6, 4, and 18 months old. "Can we call you mom?" the girl asked as she dropped her bags in the hall.

"Yes," Janine said.

Days became weeks, and then months. The kids stayed, and before long, Janine and Mark were in process with their biological mother to legally adopt all three children.

That's when things got really crazy.

In a couple of months, the adoption was finalized. Then, at age 40, Janine discovered she was pregnant. At the same time, the mother of their three adopted kids was about to have another baby, and she asked if Mark and Janine might be willing to take in this baby too when he was born.

"Yes"

And just like that, Janine, career woman, had gone from having no kids and a busy social calendar to being a full-time mother – of five children, two who were born only a couple of months apart.

When we begin to live into our call, God's abundant grace overwhelms us. Peter and his friends discovered this, too as they hauled their nets back out of the deep water that early morning and they suddenly went from no fish to so many fish they were in danger of sinking. It's true. God's call and God's blessings are often

more than we know what to do with. Saying "Yes" does not mean that our lives become easier. In fact, it is when we say "Yes" that the difficult work begins. The good news is that we are not alone. God has given us God's own promise that the Spirit will always be in our midst, to guide us, and God has given us the gift of community so that we do not have to navigate the difficult waters of our calling alone. Our community can be an invaluable resource when our journey takes us to places of uncertainty when we are forced to trust or to reckon with the reality that we are not in control.

Not long after the babies were born, Mark got laid off from his job. With no income, five kids, and a house they could no longer afford to live in, Janine and Mark were at a loss. What were they supposed to do now? Why did they ever decide to say yes to this crazy idea in first place?

Their life had been comfortable. They had more than enough. Now it felt like they were losing control of everything. It was around this time that they got a message from an old family friend they hadn't seen in years, who lived in another state:

"My husband recently passed away. I have this huge old farm. I have all these animals to care for. You need a home, and I'd be grateful for the company. You could be here as long as you needed. Would you like to come and stay with me?"

Janine and Mark did not hesitate:

"Yes"

When we come face to face with God's call, it can be terrifying. It can cause us anxiety or fill us with dread – because it will undoubtedly change us. Still, God calls us into transformation, out of our lives as they are, toward who we are created to be.

Where is God calling us? Who might we become? What is the question that we must wrestle with, or the choice we must make? What are we being called to strip away – or to move toward – so that we might become what God created us to be?

As we discern God's call for our community, let us begin in this moment with "Yes."

Life as we knew it is over.

Our transformation has already begun.

Amen.