

**Prayer** – Holy and Gracious Father, you are always true to your word; your promises never fail. Lord, we fail. We are walking contradictions: saint and sinner, yes and no. Lord, in Christ, your word is not yes and no but always yes. Help us to utter the amen. Not just with mouths that praise you but with hearts that trust your promises. All this we ask in the name of Jesus who is the truth, amen!

Pastor Russell Lackey  
Reformation L.C.  
II Corinthians 1:15-20

### Confirming God's Yes

Because I was confident of this, I planned to visit you first so that you might benefit twice. **16**I planned to visit you on my way to Macedonia and to come back to you from Macedonia, and then to have you send me on my way to Judea. **17**When I planned this, did I do it lightly? Or do I make my plans in a worldly manner so that in the same breath I say, "Yes, yes" and "No, no"? **18**But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not "Yes" and "No." **19**For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by me and Silas and Timothy, was not "Yes" and "No," but in him it has always been "Yes." **20**For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God.

#### Who is really being confirmed?

As most of you know, our second daughter, Sydney Victoria was born on Tuesday morning. It is hard to believe that Abigail (our first daughter) was ever that small. It is even harder to believe that in the blinking of an eye, Sydney will be as big as Abigail. I imagine the parents of our confirmation students feel this as well. It probably seems like yesterday that you had your children baptized and now they are being confirmed.

On Wednesday, Pirjo told me that it was in this church that her son Sascha was baptized. As water was poured over his head, God said to Sascha, "You are a keeper." And now today, Sascha is being confirmed in this church. God is faithful to his promises.

Too many people have the wrong idea about Confirmation. Many of us think the focus should be on the students. They are now voting members. They have worked hard. They have their cute white robes on. They should be made much of. But that is not where the focus belongs.

Others think that the focus should be on the parents. When their children were baptized, they made promises to place the scriptures and catechism in their child's hand. They have done that. They have pushed their children to complete confirmation even when their children did not want to. Parents should be made much of. But that is not where the focus belongs.

Maybe the focus should be on the pastor. I have to teach confirmation to 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> graders filled with raging hormones. Maybe I should be made much of. Nah! You know better than that.

The real focus of this day belongs to God. In fact, God is the one being confirmed today. God is the one proving to be faithful. You see, in holy baptism God makes important promises to us.

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3-4).

Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him. (I Peter 1:21-22)

God promises much in baptism. He promises that we are united to Christ and saved. Thus confirmation is really about whether God is faithful to his promise. Does God complete what he begins? Can God be trusted? Is God a God of Yes and No (contradiction) or is he the God of Yes? This is what today is really about.

I have a friend who refuses to baptize his children because he thinks infant baptism causes parents to shirk their duty to raise their children in faith. I asked him, if his son grows up and is not saved, whose fault is it. He said it would be his fault. I told him, if my children were not saved, I would stand before God and say, "It is your fault, you promised."

This is what is at stake in confirmation. Today, we are standing in the presence of God and we are not saying, "It is your fault." Instead, we are saying, "Amen, your promises are true. You are true to your word."

#### **Bad things cause us to doubt God's faithfulness**

Even though we believe God's faithfulness, we are still sinners. We are still quick to doubt God's faithfulness. Eve did not trust God's faithfulness when she ate the fruit. She trusted the serpent's word instead of God's word. Are we any better? We look at this world filled with natural disasters and wonder how God can be good. We look at the troubled economy and wonder how God graciously and abundantly gives us all good things. We look at the church filled with hypocrites and wonder if God actually exists.

Did you hear about the woman who invited some people over for dinner? At the table she turned to her six-year-old daughter and said, "Would you like to say the blessing? The daughter said, "I do not know what to say." The mother said, "Just say what you hear mommy say." The daughter bowed her head and said, "Lord, why on earth did I invite all these people to dinner, amen. "

We are sinners and hypocrites. This is the charge being made against Paul by the Corinthians. In our reading from II Corinthians we discover that the people were mad that Paul did not come when he had promised to come. Their conclusion, Paul must be a hypocrite. He must be a man of Yes and No. Even more, if Paul is this kind of man then his message must be a Yes and No message. And if his message is a Yes and No message then God must be a Yes and No God.

Paul refutes these claims in verse 18 and following:

But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not "Yes" and "No." For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by me and Silas and Timothy, was not "Yes" and "No," but in him it has always been "Yes." For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ (II Cor 1:18-20).

In other words, even if Paul was not always able to keep his appointment, Paul's message is still true because God is true. God is trustworthy. God's promises are always Yes.

### **A Good promise also causes us to doubt God's faithfulness**

It is at this point where we get into deeper trouble because these words seem too good to be true. Could it really be that all God's promises find their Yes in Christ? This seems a little dangerous. Think about it?

- If we are saved in the waters of baptism, then why go to church again?
- If we are saved by faith and not works, then why work?
- If God blesses the righteous and the unrighteous, why be righteous?

Aren't we taking advantage of God? Aren't we turning this into cheap grace? The answer is yes. Yes we are taking advantage of God. Yes it is cheap grace. But is there any other kind of grace? You cannot have it both ways. If it is grace then it has to be cheap. If we earned it, it would be a wage and not grace.

Timothy Wengert tells a story about a man who was struck by grace. He writes, "Ed and Mary Jo had four feisty kids; that much was certain. When they move to town, she, a lifelong Lutheran, and her children joined the congregation immediately. Within a few months Ed, who had grown up Roman Catholic, decided to join the congregation by taking adult instruction. The class always started with justification by grace through faith, and Ed, a big man worked for the railroad, caught on immediately. "So, it's all a matter of God's grace," he began. "Yes, Ed," I replied, thinking to myself what a great teacher I was. "And there's nothing you have to do." "You've got it, Ed!" I beamed. Then he paused. "Well, just don't tell the kids" (Timothy Wengert, *A Formula For Parish Practice*, p. 62).

I understand this response. It seems safer to make God a God of Yes and No. Yes you are free, but do not get carried away. Yes, you are saved. But do not freeload. We are inclined to dole out grace in doses just small enough so that no one will get the wrong idea? We are always ready to say Yes and No at once, just to cover our tracks?

The only problem is that God did not say Yes and No. God said Yes. "For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by me and Silas and Timothy, was not "Yes" and "No," but in him it has always been "Yes." For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ."

### **Christ is the glorious guarantee**

It is the last phrase that grounds these words. It is "in Christ" that we know God's Yes. In Christ, we learn that God loves us. The cross stands as our no to God, no to Jesus, no to everything he came to give. But God said Yes. Exactly through and in spite of our No, God said Yes. In Jesus all the promises of God find their Yes in him.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

"But God demonstrates his love in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

What shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger of the sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Romans 8:35, 37).

Without Christ, we are sinners that stand beneath God's No. In Christ, we stand firmly on God's Yes!

**A final lesson to the confirmation students**

Rhonda, Noah, and Sascha, this is my final confirmation lesson for you. It is one word. Yes! In the waters of baptism, God said Yes to you. In the absolution, God says Yes you are forgiven. At the Lord's Table, God says Yes this is my body and blood for you.

Is this a gift? Yes.

Is it dangerous? Yes.

Is it the work of God? Yes.

It is yes, yes, yes, all the way home. And when you die, you will hear a whisper. It will be Christ saying, "Yes, come unto me." And on the last day, Christ will shout, "YES, you are mine. YES, be with me in paradise. YES, God dwells with man. YES, I will wipe away every tear from your eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. YES, this is most certainly true."

**Yes! In Jesus' Name, Amen!**