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Easter Vigil Service

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Hope Lutheran Church

“God’s Yes”

This evening, let’s take a walk. I’m not asking you to get out of your seat, but just for a minute, let me paint a picture for you, and let’s walk to the tomb of Jesus together.

Can you picture it now? It was early morning, so it was still dark, just like it is here. Imagine that you’re there with that first group of women who went to the tomb that morning. The mood is somber, and everyone that you’re with walks quietly on the path to the tomb. You have plenty of time to think. So what are you thinking? Are you thinking of what happened to Jesus on good Friday? Have those memories of Jesus’ violent death taken away your hope? What are you feeling? Is your grief so strong that you’re simply trying to make it through, one day at a time? And when you do finally begin to speak, perhaps to yourself, perhaps to the women going to the tomb with you, perhaps quietly to God in prayer, what do you say?

In all likelihood, the word that captures what the women were thinking, feeling, perhaps even speaking on their way to the tomb is the word “no.” On good Friday, they had watched the whole world say “no” to Jesus, by putting him on a cross. And now, they walked to the tomb with plenty of “no’s” of their own. Can you imagine some of them?

No, Jesus can’t be our Lord, our savior. We thought he was, we believed, but now, he’s dead and can’t be. No, Jesus isn’t our savior.

No, Jesus isn’t with us anymore. He’s gone. They’ve killed him, and no one comes back from that.

No, we don’t have any reason for joy. We thought that through Jesus, God would redeem us, save us, call us back to him. But our joy has been taken.

And maybe, just like those women, you’ve come into church this evening with some “no’s” of your own. It’s easy to say “no” to God, especially when the events in our lives challenge us, cause us pain, make us doubt God’s love for us. What are some of your “no’s” this evening?

No, God, you can’t love me. What I’ve done is too horrible, too terrible. There’s no forgiveness for me.

No, God, what you ask from me is too difficult. My sin isn’t harming anyone. Your commands aren’t for me.

No, God, you aren’t in control. I’ve lost my job, my marriage is a wreck, my kids are out of control. This is too much, even for you.

Do you get the sense this evening that maybe we aren’t that much different than those women who went to the tomb on the first Easter Sunday? In the face of what they had seen Jesus go through, all they could say was “no.” Sometimes, when we suffer, when we hurt, when we fall into sin, all we can say is “no.”

But now, for just a minute, imagine that you’re back with the women again, there. And you catch sight of the tomb. What are you expecting? A dead Jesus, feelings of grief, feelings of sadness. You’ve prepared for a funeral. But what do you see instead? The tomb is empty. But what’s there beside the empty tomb? You can’t believe what you’re seeing. An angel there, with a message. A powerful message. Why do you look for the living among the dead? He isn’t here. He is risen. The funeral has turned to a celebration.

Your “no” suddenly turns to “yes.”

Yes, Jesus is God’s promised savior.

Yes, our hope was not in vain.

Yes, death couldn’t hold him in.

Yes, he is risen.

Yes.

The theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer once wrote that the resurrection is God’s “yes” to Jesus. Isn’t that beautiful? On that bloody, violent good Friday, the entire world had said “no” to Jesus by putting him on a cross. And yet, on that first Easter Sunday, God had said “Yes” to Jesus, by raising him from the dead.

Yes, this is my promised messiah. Yes, this is my beloved son. Yes, this is the one through whom sin, death, and the devil have been conquered. The resurrection is God’s “yes” to Jesus.

But the resurrection of Jesus is God’s “yes” to all of us as well. And boy, do we need it. We all need to hear God’s yes loud and clear. How many of you are parents? I see plenty of hands. Me too. And parents, you know that one of the first things that kids learn how to say is the word “NO.” No, I won’t eat my veggies. No, I don’t want to go to bed. No, I won’t pick up my toys. And the list of “Nos” goes on and on.

And that self-centeredness that our kids are born with, that we’re all born with, is an indication of a much deeper problem. And that problem is that we’re all born saying “no” to God and his perfect will for our lives. If it were up to us, we would never love God, come to him, accept him, want to keep his commands. We would just keep right on saying “NO” to our heavenly father.

God has to be the one to intervene, to bring us to him because on our own, we can’t do it.

We won’t do it. And God intervenes by connecting us to Jesus.

We saw it this evening, didn’t we? God connecting children to Jesus in the waters of baptism. Through simple water and God’s word, we’re connected to Jesus. That part of us that keeps saying “NO” to God is washed away in the waters of baptism, and a new person is born, a person connected to Jesus and his righteousness, his holiness, his perfection. When God looks at his baptized child, he doesn’t see a rebellious, sinful child. He sees a child connected to Jesus, covered by Jesus. He sees holiness, righteousness, obedience to his will, perfection. That old sinful part of us dies, and a new creation is raised to life, just as Jesus was raised to new life on that first Easter morning. When God looks at you, he sees a new creation. And he says “Yes.”

Yes, I love you. Yes, I accept you. Yes, you are forgiven. Yes, you are my child. Yes, you are righteous, holy, perfect in my eyes. Yes.

This past week, I attended a funeral, and at the gravesite, the pastor said that the resurrection of Jesus is a Christian’s reason for hope. And that’s true. This hope is ours because God’s yes is final, trustworthy, and secure. The tomb is empty. Jesus is alive. And through his resurrection, God’s yes is for all of us, for all time. This is our hope. Amen.