

The message given by Rev. Dr. Thomas E. Zoelzer on Sunday, March 7, 2010 based on 2 Corinthians 5:17-21.

"Saying 'Yes' to Yourself"

A minister dies and is waiting in line at the pearly gates. Ahead of him is a guy dressed in sunglasses, a white shirt, a leather jacket and jeans. St. Peter addresses this guy, "Who you are, that I may know whether or not to admit you to the kingdom of heaven?"

The guy said, "I'm Joe Choen, taxi driver of Las Vegas."

St. Peter consults his list, smiles, and says to the taxi driver, "Take this silken robe and golden staff and enter the kingdom of heaven. Welcome!" The taxi driver goes into heaven with his robe and staff, and it's the minister's turn.

He stands erect and booms out, "I am Joseph Larson, pastor of St. Lucas Lutheran Church for the last forty-five years."

St. Peter consults his list, frowns a little, and says to the minister, "Take this cotton robe and wooden staff and enter the kingdom of heaven."

"Just a minute," says the minister. "That man was a taxi driver, and he gets a silken robe and golden staff. How can this be?"

"Up here, we work by results," says St. Peter. "While you preached, people slept; while he drove people prayed."

Saying 'Yes!' to yourself – My hunch is that you are wondering how at church we could be saying 'Yes!' to ourselves, especially during Lent. Lent for many people is about giving up things and suffering. How can we say 'Yes!' to ourselves during this time?

Yes, Lent is a time of reflection and spiritual discipline – a time to add on things that make us a healthier, more complete person. Therefore,

saying 'Yes!' to ourselves makes perfect sense during Lent because saying 'Yes!' to God is also about saying 'Yes!' to neighbor and 'Yes!' to yourself. They all go together. It is like Trinity – Saying yes to Jesus is saying yes to God and yes to the Holy Spirit all at the same time.

Robert Voyle, who is an Anglican priest, therapist, and inspiration behind this series, writes that *Saying Yes! to yourself is not about violently pursuing egotistical fulfillment at the expense of our real self and others, but rather it is about manifesting those God-given talents and abilities to the benefit of yourself and the world.*

In his book, *Making a Life, Making a Living* published in 2000, author Mark Albion reports on a research project involving 1,500 MBA graduates. As they graduated the students were asked, "What are you going to do next" – would they go after their passion, or would they go after the money?

1,245 (83%) of them said that they would "go after the money" and that when they got their nest egg together, then they would follow their passion. The graduates were tracked over time, and 101 of them became millionaires.

Analysis of this outcome showed that of this group of 101 millionaires all but one came from the 255 who followed their passion. Only one of those who pursued financial wealth actually achieved the monetary goal, whereas 40% of those who pursued their passion also experienced the secondary fruit of financial reward. What the research tells us is that living a life that has personal meaning and significance is more likely to be blessed with financial reward than just pursuing financial reward in and of itself. So the question is, "What are you passionate about?"

One of the great heresies of our day is the idea that if we enjoy something it can't be of God. Or people think that we can tell if something is really a calling from God because we don't want to do it.

While we can acknowledge that the world is full of things that tempt us to misuse God's gifts to us, the capacity for pleasure and enjoyment is God-given. After love, joy is the second fruit of the Spirit. Loving what you do and enjoying it are part of our heritage as children of God. It would clearly be an offense to God not to enjoy those abilities with which we have been endowed. We will be most enthusiastic about life when we are doing those things that flow from the core of our being: doing those things that manifest our God-given uniqueness and purpose. Are you doing those things that flow from the core of your being?

Here is something to think about – we have been given a life to live; we are not here to live someone else's life. Our families may have placed expectations upon us that we may have either lived up to, or rebelled against, but at some point we have to consciously choose how we will live and what we will do. You get to choose what you will say Yes! to. God will never ask us why we weren't like our brothers or sisters, or one of the saints. God will only ask us what we have done with the life that God gave us.

So what have you done or are doing with your gifts, with what you are passionate about? The problem is that sometimes pursuing what we are passionate about would mean change. Change is hard. Change is scary. But change motivated by emotional and spiritual fulfillment brings great joy. Do you have enough joy in your life?

I have colleagues who because of their passions have taken off the 3 piece suit or the lab coat and gone into ministry because that is where

their passion is. I also have colleagues who have taken off the robes and done something else because they were not finding joy in what they were doing.

After love comes joy as a gift from God. Do you have enough joy in your life? People tell me that it is hard to have joy right now. The economy sucks, the future is uncertain, and life is hard. Yes, life is hard right now, but it doesn't need to be joyless. Saying yes to what we are passionate about brings joy and life. What better time to pursue those things but right now!

Our scripture today is from 2 Corinthians. I know I don't preach from 2 Corinthians very often. Some scholars think that 2 Corinthians is a combination of letters written by Paul put together later. Other scholars believe 2 Corinthians was written by followers of Paul who came later.

Because of all this discussion, 2 Corinthians is not preached very often which is too bad because it has one of my favorite metaphors about Jesus Christ – describing Jesus as “treasure in clay jars.” Do you know what clay jars were in those days? – Clay jars were the Tupperware of biblical times.

So the writer of 2 Corinthians chapter 4 puts it this way in speaking about Jesus Christ –

⁷But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. ⁸We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies.

This is an important metaphor during these economic times. Chapter 5 teaches us that because of our faith in God through Christ we

are new creations ready to be reconciled to God, each other, and ourselves and ready to move forward by saying 'Yes!' to things we are passionate about so that we can find the joy God wants us to experience. Saying 'Yes!' to yourself is about bringing out your gifts and interests for joy. Are you following your passions and gifts?

A clergyperson writes: I am going to say a word. The moment I say the word I want you to see a face, to recall a face and a name, someone who comes to your mind when I say the word. Are you ready? The word is *bitter*. Bitter. Do you see a face? I see a face. I see the face of a farmer in western Oklahoma, riding a mortgaged tractor, burning gasoline purchased on credit, moving across rented land, rearranging the dust. Bitter.

Do you see a face? I see the face of a man who runs a small grocery store. His father ran the store in that neighborhood for twenty years, and he is now in his twelfth year there. The grocery doesn't make much profit, but it keeps the family together. It's a business. There are no customers in the store now, and the grocer stands in the doorway with his apron rolled up around his waist, looking across the street where workmen are completing a supermarket. Bitter.

Now I am going to say another word and see if a face and name come to mind. This word is joy. Do you see a face? I see the face of a young couple. They have discovered that he really has the gift and passion for parenting, and she has a sense for business. He stands in the doorway with the kids while she heads to the train station. Joy.

I see the face of a person reaching retirement age. But she has always had the idea of inventing a product that will be an industry

breakthrough. She smiles as she looks over her work at her home desk.
Joy.

Do you see a face? So, when you go home after worship today and look in the mirror, what face will you see?

Saying Yes to yourself is about saying 'Yes' to God, 'Yes' to your neighbor, and 'Yes' to yourself in ways that make you complete, that brings out your gifts, that brings you joy. God wants you to have life and have it abundantly! I invite you to say 'Yes' to yourself and live the trinity of saying 'Yes' to God, 'Yes' to neighbor, and 'Yes' to yourself. Amen.