

"Yes, No, and Maybe"

Text: Luke 2:33-34

May God grant to each of us a faith that will not waver, though the waves of persecution and ridicule beat against it daily, and may God himself also inspire our thoughts and direct our steps in the coming New Year. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

It is a quote often attributed to Robert F. Kennedy, who actually borrowed the line from the Spanish painter Pablo Picasso: "*Others have seen what is and asked why. I have seen what could be and asked why not.*" It's one of those sayings that could be either very good or very bad, depending on the perspective or goal. For example, at some point in history, someone loaded down with packages must have wondered why we couldn't get doors to open automatically when we walk up to them. Nothing wrong with that sort of a "*Why not?*" On the other hand, at some point Charles Darwin must have asked, "*Why can't we get rid of the old Biblical idea of origins and teach our children that we more or less created ourselves?*" Obviously the wrong sort of "*Why not?*"

This is the challenge we will explore this morning as we stand at the end of one year and the beginning of another: *How do we consistently recognize what can safely be changed and what cannot? How do we figure out what is, and is not, optional for Christians? How do we strive for ever better without discarding what is not optional? In other words, how do we know when the right answer is yes, maybe, or no?*

The text that will form the basis for our study this morning is found in the Second Chapter of Luke's Gospel.

^{ESV} **Luke 2:33-34** *And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴ And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed ³⁵ (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."*

So far the very words of our God. Truly these are perfect words, spoken long ago by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. That is why we can never study or meditate on these inspired words too often, too carefully, or too deeply. This is the pure, life-giving Word of God. That God the Holy Spirit would work his goodness in our hearts through our study of these words we pray, "**Sanctify us by Your Truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!**" Amen.

It's the age-old dilemma – not unique to Christians, but that is the perspective from which we ask the question this morning. *How do we recognize those times in life when our God is beckoning us onward, and when he is in fact signaling us to stop? How do we know when God is waving us on, and when he is waving us off?*

According to the new man in each of us, Christians want to do the right, God-pleasing thing. According to the old Adam in us, Christians are no different than the world around us in that that part in us wants to do the wrong thing, the thing that displeases God but which the flesh finds most appealing. More difficult still is the fact that even when we are walking "in the new man" it is not always perfectly clear to us which of two (or more) paths our God would have us take. In other words, when it comes to sin, there we have a clear word from our God that tells us exactly which actions are wrong and which are right. Less clear are those times when we are trying to decide between good, better, and best; or when we are just trying to make a decision or to opt for the course of action that is most pleasing to our God.

I'm sure you've faced this sort of dilemma – probably often. Is this the person I should marry? Is this the job (if any) that I should take? Should I stay home with the children, and for how long? Should I continue my education and, if so, for how long and where? Should I upgrade or be content with what I have? Should I hoard and invest my money for the future, or enjoy life more right now? How much advice should I offer my adult children? When should I retire? What exactly should I do with my life after I retire? These are the sorts of things where – if you're like me – you find yourself wishing that God would make his will painfully obvious to you. God in his Word does give us direction; it's just hard to be sure sometimes. These are the "maybe's" of life, and unfortunately they will always prove challenging for God's children.

This morning we are actually going to plunge a bit deeper into this whole question as we return to the quote we heard at the outset: "*Others have seen what is and asked why. I have seen what could be and asked why not.*"

Maybe you can see the problem here. The positive, Christian understanding of the quote is that Christians should never be content with anything less than perfection, with anything less than excellence as God determines excellence. The bad understanding or perspective centers around the questioning of the social rules or parameters that

have been established by God and accepted by society on that basis – as God's will. Unfortunately our society has sold out to the latter. They advocate tossing out all that they have been taught about right and wrong and to developing instead their own rules and parameters. Your parents and grandparents taught you that you should only live together after you are married. Why? Says whom? Why not do what you want, when you want? Your pastor and Sunday school teachers taught you that you were created by a God to whom you are therefore accountable, but is that really true? The Bible says that same-sex relationships are sinful, but who can or should dictate what is right for you, personally? In general, why not cast off every single thing that you learned about right and wrong and boldly live your life as you want to live it? After all, human beings have forever asked why things are the way they are; why don't you be the one to break free and do what feels right to you?

Society has demonstrated, in other words, that no one but you gets to decide yes, maybe, or no. In fact they have been doing exactly that for some time now, and they would like the rest of the world to imagine that we can do so without negative consequences or fear of divine wrath. That's "groupthink," but permit another secular quote to demonstrate the folly of groupthink. Henry Ford once said, *"If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses."*

You get the point. Had Henry Ford accepted groupthink and "the will of the people" as his guide in life, he would never have accomplished what he did. What that tells us is that even secular society itself admits that the very thing they are peddling to today's youth – "question everything" – has merit, but *only* if you happen to choose the right alternate path. What they lack, of course, is any and all divine guidance when it comes to making that determination. Picture in your minds a room with a thousand doors. Society tells us that every door is right for you, as long as you pick without outside help or influence. Some would even say that the right door for you is any door *except* the one your parents and pastor pointed out.

Here's the problem with their line of reasoning: God says that when it comes to our salvation, there is only one right door, one right path or belief system. One door leads to heaven; all others lead to hell.

Plug that into Picasso's statement: *"Others have seen what is and asked why. I have seen what could be and asked why not."* Fine. Ask the questions but let God answer. *"Why not alternate doors? Why not alternate paths? Why travel the same spiritual road my Christian parents walked instead of a different path that feels more right to me?"* Again, go and check if God has already answered these questions.

The facts of eternal life, as determined by God himself, are these: 1) Every human being that sins, even once, destroys his relationship with his God. 2) If that relationship with God is not repaired, a human being will face an eternity in hell. 3) Man has no power to repair that broken relationship on his own. He needs an outside source of help to do so. 4) The only outside source of help that God acknowledges as effective in repairing the relationship between God and man is Jesus Christ. 5) Faith alone in Jesus Christ is the only thing that can make Jesus' goodness our own and restore our relationship to our Creator-God.

These are God's facts. Man can challenge them, question them, doubt them, even deny them. None of that changes the reality that God has established. ***"He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; he that believes not shall be condemned."***

Interestingly enough, although Scripture defines faith of being certain of something that you cannot prove, there is anecdotal evidence all around us that testifies to the fact that any departure from God's never-changing will brings untold hardship and heartache. Many of you may recall the "free love" experiments of the 60's. Society pretty much did exactly what Picasso suggested. They looked at God's approved "one man, one woman, for life" marriage plan and asked, *"Why not something different?"* In fact they did more than ask; they experimented with alternatives. They decided to try open marriages where either spouse could "be with" whomever they wanted, whenever they wanted. The results were as predictable as they were catastrophic. Man cannot discard God and expect that same God to bless their perversion. There is a reason, by the way, that the "great ideas" of the 60's died in the 70's.

Still not content to *"humble themselves under the mighty hand of God,"* society decided to question the time-honored position that women did not possess the right to kill their unborn children. The results, again, are inevitable and catastrophic. Women who murder their preborn children exchange the pure joy of the creation of life for a lifetime of guilt and shame. While their friends are sending out birth announcements and bubbling over with parental bliss, they are slinking in and out of abortion clinics and struggling desperately to hide their actions from family and friends. Afterward they are sentenced to a lifetime of guilt and shame, wondering, for the rest of their lives, at just what might have been.

The list is endless. Men and women who live together outside of marriage blush with shame when confronted by their pastor or parents. Those who follow God's plan and marry before they live together gladly welcome other Christians into their home and live without fear of God's displeasure at what they are doing.

All of these, and countless more, are evidence that God himself has, more often than not, already answered our "Why not?" questions.

Which brings us finally to our text. The words of our text are part of what Simeon said to Mary and Joseph when they, *following the rules that God had established*, presented Jesus in the temple. We read in our text that Jesus' earthly parents **"marveled at what was said about him."** What we don't hear, but what they nonetheless may well have also wondered, is *"Why?"* and *"Why not?"*

Why does it have to be true that **"a sword will pierce through my own soul also?"** Why does it have to be that way? Why can't our baby have a normal life and die quietly in his old age? Why does he have to be the one that divides all mankind – those who believe in him going to heaven and those who reject going to hell? Why can't someone else's baby be **"appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed"?**

The answer is that these are some of those *facts* that cannot be changed. They have been declared by God, and they stand as true and immutable regardless of how man questions, doubts, or yearns for another way. You will recall how 33 years later Peter asked why Jesus had to go to Jerusalem to die. More than that, he tried to talk Jesus out of it. He looked for options. This is exactly what happens whenever we fail to accept the facts as God dictates. Jesus had to be who he was and do what he did or all mankind would have been forever damned. There are such things in life – immutable, unmovable, unalterable facts of life and death that are not open to negotiation by man.

God grant us the faith and the grace to accept the truth as God has revealed it in his Word, and the divine wisdom to recognize and reject the options of Satan and those that are his. This is the Christian life – to believe without question or reservation that Jesus is exactly who he said he was and that he did exactly what he said he did, and to struggle instead against the sin that the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh would have us believe is also a fact of life that we must accept and embrace. God grant us such wisdom and grace in the New Year and beyond. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Exodus 13:1-15** The LORD said to Moses, ² "Consecrate to me all the firstborn. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine." ³ ¶ Then Moses said to the people... ¹¹ ¶ "When the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites, as he swore to you and your fathers, and shall give it to you, ¹² you shall set apart to the LORD all that first opens the womb. All the firstborn of your animals that are males shall be the LORD's. ¹³ Every firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. Every firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem. ¹⁴ And when in time to come your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' you shall say to him, 'By a strong hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery. ¹⁵ For when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of animals. Therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all the males that first open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.'

^{ESV} **Luke 2:22-32, 39-40** And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons." ²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. ²⁶ And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. ²⁷ And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, ²⁸ he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, ²⁹ "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; ³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation ³¹ that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, ³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." ³⁹ ¶ And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰ And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: www.bismarcklutheran.org

Mark Johnson, President Angela Pfennig, Organist
Michael Roehl, Pastor

The First Sunday after Christmas – December 30, 2018

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 110 (Stanzas 1-2, 4) (Melody 383) (Red Hymnal)

"Across the Sky the Shades of Night"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: ((Exodus 13:1-15) Christians rightly see Jesus everywhere in the Old Testament. We do so not only because we know that the entire Old Testament pointed ahead to Jesus, but also because the New Testament so dictates. This morning, for example, we recognize the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament as that which found fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus. So it was that the ceremonial sacrifices pointed to the great "once for all" sacrifice of God's Son as payment for all sin.

Psalm 91 (Supplement page 33) (Brown Hymnal)

The New Testament Lesson: (Luke 2:22-32, 39-40) Jesus had good parents. As such they did all that was required of good, God-fearing parents – here bringing Jesus to the temple at the prescribed time and offering the prescribed sacrifice. Jesus kept every single law, and thereby serves as our perfect sin offering – thereby also fulfilling every Old Testament prophecy.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – page 5 (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 375 (Stanzas 1-2, 5) (Red Hymnal)

"If Thy Beloved Son, O God"

The Sermon – Text: Luke 2:33-34 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Yes, No, and Maybe"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 317 (Stanzas 1-3) Red Hymnal)

"Alas, My God, My Sins Are Great"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 110 (Stanzas 5-6) (Melody 383) (Red Hymnal)

"Across the Sky the Shades of Night"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune** – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

Attendance - Sunday (31) Average (40) Monday (32) Tuesday (17)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/ Holy Communion
	-11:30 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee hour
Wednesday	-No Midweek Classes	
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee time

CLC News – Pastor Richard Kanzenbach is considering the call to Bethel or Morris, MN. Although all individual orphan sponsorships are now filled, group sponsorships are still available. See Pastor Roehl for details.

Next Week's Schedule – Since Pastor Roehl will be out of town this week visiting family, there will be no Confirmation Class or Midweek Bible Study this Wednesday. Pastor Roehl is scheduled to return on Friday.

Church Council Installation – The 2019 Church Council is scheduled to be installed next Sunday during the regular worship service.

Care Packages – The Women's Fellowship is again accepting donations for care packages for our four members currently attending school away from home. Those contributing are asked to bring quantities that can be divided into four care packages. The deadline (and final "assembly" date) is February 2. Please contact Sandy Roehl if you have any questions.