

Series: Words & Deeds Matter Part 2: “A Yes Born Out In Your Life”

Isaiah 25:1-9

Psalm 23

Philippians 4:1-9

Matthew 22:1-14

Church people, that’s who we are, come to places of worship with all kinds of wants and varied life experiences. The good news is that the host of our service is the Good Shepherd, whose disposition is one of unrelenting love, mercy, and grace. God’s care for God’s children comes from God’s covenantal love which is promised to each one of us. It does not come because of our exceptionalism. It comes from us responding YES to Jesus’ invitation to follow him.

What is the disposition of the shepherd? In the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, the word “disposition” is defined as “a person’s inherent qualities of mind and character.” The disposition of some people is to be negative and judgmental. The disposition of God, our shepherd, is one of acting lovingly, mercifully, and lovingly toward people. I thank Paul Harvey (September 4, 1918-February 28, 2009), the legendary syndicated radio personality, for the following story. Harvey relates,

Cattle-rustling is a major problem in Uganda. The Ugandan army daily attempts to reunite cattle with their owners. The biggest difficulty lies in proving ownership. The BBC’s Nathan Etungu witnessed the process beginning in a village north of Mbale. He told the BBC’s Network Africa that when an elderly woman stood before the herd a remarkable thing happened. She called her cows by name and to the amusement of the soldiers, as each cow heard her voice, it lifted its head and then followed her. As far as the army was concerned, it was as strong a proof of ownership as one could find.<sup>1</sup>

God, the Good Shepherd, relates to each one of us by name.

Isaiah 25:1-9, Psalm 23, Philippians 4:1-9, and Matthew 22:1-14 confirm this point: The

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<sup>1</sup>Heard on Paul Harvey (2-28-03); “Ugandan Cows Know Their Names,” BBC.com, (2-25-03).

problem with the view we hold, a biblical one, is we are the chosen people. That is true, God chose Abraham and we have been adopted into God's Covenant, God's family, the chosen people. God's disposition is to shepherd each of us individually, and collectively, as a church family, with unrelenting love, mercy, and grace. God shepherd's us, not because of our exceptionalism, but because of God's love, mercy, and grace.

Isaiah 25:1-9 announces that God's choice of God's people is not because of exceptionalism. Why? Exceptionalism is often used as moral justification by empires and individuals that claim normative global ethical rules do not apply to those who are called. Isaiah 25:1 reads, "O LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you, I will praise your name; for you have done wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure." Only God is exceptional. Only God is just, merciful, and compassionate. Only God is always faithful. God's plans are certain, faithful, and sure.

Psalms 23 articulates a clear call for followers of Jesus, the people of God, to participate in their relationship with God. That is to feel the words of Psalm 23 in their mouth as well as their heart. Psalm 23:6 reads, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long." God is mighty. God does wonderful things. God is our comfort. God provides. God wipes away all of our tears.

Philippians 4:1-9 addresses that the good news of the gospel, more often than not, emerges from problems that are occurring in the local church. In Philippians 4:2-3 Paul writes, "I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion [Timothy], help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life." Conflict is. Tension is. Struggle over identity is. Yet, Paul states that being of the same

mind in Christ produces joy and an advancement of the mission of God in which we participate.

Matthew 22:1-14 affirms the one who hears the YES born out in their life will often not look like or behave like the many of others they know. Matthew 22:11-14 reads,

But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, and he said to him, “Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?” And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, “Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” For many are called, but few are chosen.

Jesus is saying, in a difficult way, that many show up at events that are about him. But few really get it and will appear not to be a part of the larger group. They, however, are the ones who are chosen.<sup>2</sup>

Rob Bell, the author of *Love Wins* writes,

When we say yes to God, when we open ourselves to Jesus’s living, giving act on the cross, we enter into a way of life. He is the source, the strength, the example, and the assurance that this pattern of death and rebirth is the way into the only kind of life that actually sustains and inspires.<sup>3</sup>

You have the opportunity to have the mind of Christ and be generous through your Life Wallet.

How? Through the way you love being fully aware that God birthed in you and continues to birth in you to say YES to Jesus’ invitation to the Feast (the Great Banquet), even when you feel the odd person out.

Listen carefully to these “Points for Success” for you to be generous with your Life Wallet through your time, talent, and treasure. I’d like you to ponder each point and its associated Bible verses. Do pick up a copy of this sermon manuscript on the way out of worship

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<sup>2</sup>In the five paragraphs of textual analysis above, I have benefited from the thinking of Miguel A. De La Torre, Brian D. Russell, Leigh Campbell-Taylor, Troy A. Miller, Carol J. Dempsey, OP, Michael E. Lee, and Theodore J. Wardlaw in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year A, Volume 3* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 372-375, 375-376, 377-379, 380-382, 382-384, 385-387, and 387-388.

<sup>3</sup>Rob Bell, *Love Wins* (New York, New York: HarperOne, 2011), 136.

this morning at the Welcome Booth.

### 2024 Generosity Campaign Points for Success<sup>4</sup>

- i. Psalm 46: 1-3 Because of our previous overspending and use of one-time assets, even with one pastor and some trimming of other staff expenses, we need as far as possible to maintain (or increase) our current level of financial giving. (October 1, 2023)
- ii. Hebrews 12: 1-3 With a reduced staff, we will be more reliant on volunteer activity in many areas. (October 8, 2023)
- iii. Romans 12: 3-8 Supporting Geneva can take many forms, from financial giving to volunteering in missional life, congregational life, administration, or other areas — and simply connecting within or outside the congregation or praying. (October 8, 2023)
- iv. Mark 12: 41-46 We recognize that people’s ability to support via financial or volunteer activities may vary, given different financial situations, health situations, or other commitments — and so we ask people to help to the extent that they feel called and able in their current circumstances. (October 15, 2023)
- v. 1 Peter 4: 8-11 As we try to find a path that includes both a degree of continuity and a degree of change, and that tries to be effective in both our evangelical and social-justice commitments in a changing society, we value the support of every single person who is invested in Geneva. (October 22, 2023)

Do not forget, the owner of the cows in Mbale, Uganda who called each cow by name and it responded and came to her.

The Good Shepherd births a YES in you to accept his invitation to join the party. You will feel out of sync with many of those at the party. Say YES to Jesus and join the party of a lifetime. Will you say YES to be and live in the mind of Christ? Every single person who calls Geneva Presbyterian Church their church home is invited to say YES to being generous through living as a follower of Jesus from your Life Wallet. Say YES. Be the best Jesus. Amen!

*This sermon was preached on Sunday, 15 October 2023 by the Rev. Dr. Steven M. Marsh  
at Geneva Presbyterian Church in Laguna Woods, California*

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<sup>4</sup>Source is Ruling Elder John Pomery.