

**Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> August 2019**  
**Trinity 10 (C)**

**Liverpool Parish Church**

**OT: Isaiah 58.9b-end**  
**NT: Hebrews 12.18-end**  
**G: Luke 13.10-17**

The comedian Danny Wallace embarked on a project some years ago now where he determined that he would say Yes to every opportunity offered to him. He had been feeling depressed and isolated and decided that being negative was no help. He listened to three simple words uttered by a stranger on a bus—"Say yes more"—as a challenge and he said "yes" to everything for a year. He said "yes" to pamphleteers on the street, the credit card offers stuffing his mailbox and solicitations on the Internet. He attended meetings with a group that believed aliens built the pyramids in Egypt, said "yes" to every invitation to go out on the town and furthered his career by saying "yes" in meetings with executives. From his experience came the book and the film, 'Yes Man' and a new romantic relationship. All in all, he had a pretty good year.

Saying 'No' initially is many people's, mine included, default position. It gives an opportunity to play for time to think, to decide if there are any advantages to saying 'Yes'. It enables us not to commit if we don't want to. It allows us to play it safe.

In today's readings, three voices from across the centuries, including Jesus himself, urge us to be positive. Not to be confined by what we think are our own needs. To accept what we cannot understand by stepping outside our comfort zone and embracing the challenges offered. To see that sometimes rules are there to be broken to enable a greater good to come about. Isaiah asks us to reach out to meet the needs of others.

He promises that by sharing what we have we will not be poorer but richer beyond our imagination.

*if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday.*

*The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.*

What have we to lose? Surely our response should be a resounding 'Yes'. And the offer gets better. Isaiah goes on to talk about keeping the Sabbath, keeping it as an opportunity to dwell in the presence of God, to put aside our cares and concerns for the duration.

*if you call the sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honourable;*

*if you honour it, not going your own ways, serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs;*

*then you shall take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth;*

Yes please. A double win. To put aside oneself for a day **and** to be caught up in the joy and serenity of the Lord.

If Isaiah calls us to keep the Sabbath, Jesus seeks to clarify that message. By the adherence of strict rules, by no longer considering the true meaning, by turning a positive into a negative, the Pharisees had undermined the true meaning of the Sabbath. It was no longer something to delight in but to endure. And Jesus, as in so many things, turned it on its head. In truth, he turned it back the right way up. He did it by showing compassion and care for the woman who was suffering. By healing her there in the synagogue, he showed the true meaning of the Sabbath, a time to come close to *Mount Zion, the city of the living God.*

The healing of the woman was a reflection of the healing that Jesus is offering to all of us, a healing from sin and the promise of eternal life made possible through his death and resurrection.

The Pharisees are used as an example of those who have hardened their hearts to God, who no longer allow the power of his grace to course through their being, who have closed themselves to his life giving Spirit. Let us heed their example and turn and give an unequivocal 'Yes' to the life that the Father is offering through the grace of the Son in the power of the Spirit.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews tells of a world of cataclysmic power  
*a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that not another word be spoken to them.*

But we have Jesus as our mediator and we are being offered a very different world.

*But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus.*

We are being offered a place in the kingdom of God, a prize beyond our comprehension a gift that we are unable to weigh up because we can never understand its full measure until the day we view it through the eyes of our Redeemer. And the writer to the Hebrews urges us not to dither but to accept this gift which is far too good to refuse. Just say 'Yes'.

What we are being offered is something that we could never deserve by our own merits, this is not something that God is obliged to give us. This is a gift given in love by a God who has to power to destroy as well as to build. This almighty God has chosen you, me, and wants more than anything that we should say 'Yes'.

Saying 'Yes' to whatever God asks of or offers to us will not necessarily be the easiest option but, in the name of Jesus, it will always be the most rewarding one.

*Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe;*

The Revd Michelle Montrose