

November 12, 2017 • Consecration Sunday

## “Who Will Hear Our YES?”

Sermon by the Rev. Patricia Farris



*Psalm 78:1-7*

*Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth.*

*I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old, things that we have heard and known, that our ancestors have told us.*

*We will not hide them from their children; we will tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done.*

*He established a decree in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our ancestors to teach to their children; that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and rise up and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments;*

Each Sunday, our eyes are lifted to the stained-glass window in the front of our sanctuary. Jesus stands outside a closed door, knocking. There's a very interesting story behind this window, recounted by our own Ron Theile in his series of meditations on the windows of our sanctuary. While all the other windows were designed and created by the Judson Studios here in Pasadena, this window is unique. Here's the story of how it came to be.

A member of this church of a few generations ago, Dr. Hubert Wilken, was visiting the United Methodist Church in Sacramento and saw this window in that sanctuary. He was so moved by it, that he commissioned the Church Glass Company of San Francisco to make a copy of it for our sanctuary. And so it was. I later met his son, Frank, and daughter-in-law Rae who were very active lay members of our California-Pacific Conference. Each year when we met in Redlands, they'd remember Frank's dad and were always eager to hear how things were going at Santa Monica First. "Oh Lord, you are still our dwelling place for all generations..."

But there's more to the story of the window itself. When first installed, the window depicted a door knob there on the outside of the door. Dr. Wilken, Ron recounts, upon seeing this and realizing that the door can only be opened from within, paid for the removal of the knob.

"Listen, I am standing at the door, knocking," we read in the Book of Revelation, Chapter 3, verse 20. Jesus says: "Listen, I am standing at the door knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me." "Are we listening?" the window asks us each week. Christ is here, knocking, yearning for us to open the door that he might come in.

Each week, the Spirit of God in Christ Jesus waits, just outside the door of our hearts, inviting us, urging us even, to renew our love. Oh, how eager God is for us to respond. Are we so busy and preoccupied that we do not hear the knock? Are we so comfortable in the same-old, same-old that we don't bother to answer anymore? Are we afraid of what he might ask of us, that we crouch down behind the door hoping he won't know that we are inside?

And what happens when we say "YES!" and open the door? What happens when Christ comes into our hearts anew and awakens us to new life, new possibilities, new hope? What happens—amazing things. We hear it here all the time. We heard it in the stories our young families shared with us on Laity Sunday. I heard it in the voice a little girl just last Sunday. Scrambling to get here, worship was about to begin. She came through the front door first, pulling her dad in behind her. "Hurry, Dad," she said, "we need to get in for church!" We hear it from our youth every time they report back on their mission trip. Our Haiti Team, too. We say "YES," we open the door to our hearts and amazing things happen.

Jesus knocks, we say YES, amazing things happen.

A few more examples. A group of you is organizing our participation in the Habitat for Humanity build. The start date has been pushed back a bit as we work through a few more details with Culver City, but we're ready to go. Teams lined up. We raised \$30,000. And sometime in the next year or so, the Mulvihill family will have a home. With actual door knobs on both sides like everyone's home has. A home that is wheel-chair accessible, accommodating their youngest son, Kendall. All because we answered when Christ knocked.

UMCOR. The United Methodist Committee on Relief. When ferocious hurricanes devastated our nation from Houston to Puerto Rico, Christ knocked again and we opened the door. Our YES raised \$5100 and we assembled 125 hygiene kits. We United Methodists are front and center in the clean-up and in the rebuilding of homes, schools, communities, and lives. We have said YES in a very big way.

I could go on and on with stories of what we're making possible not only as a congregation but what so many of you are making happen day in and day out across our community.

This morning, another opportunity to Say YES awaits. It's Consecration Sunday. We've got our traditional box out, polished like our best silver and ready to once again receive our financial pledges for another year. But what does it really mean to consecrate our pledges? What's really going on here, with this box, and this procession, and this ritual of showing that something very special is happening?

“Consecrate” is a rather old-fashioned word, isn’t it? We don’t use it much in every day speech. Consecrate means to dedicate to a service or goal. Veterans consecrate themselves to the security and highest ideals of our nation. In church language, ‘to consecrate’ means to declare or set apart as sacred, to make sacred. And so we consecrate churches, and cemeteries. We consecrate bishops. We consecrate the communion elements, bread and wine. We consecrate the pledge of our financial gifts. In so doing, we set all these things apart from common life or use and dedicate them to the service of God.

What we’re about this morning, as we prepare to come forward and place our pledge cards in this special box on this Consecration Sunday, is directing our hearts towards God. We are celebrating the sanctification of our lives. The consecration of our hearts to a holy purpose. We’ve heard Christ knocking and we are opening the door wide, opening ourselves to God’s holy, patient, persistent work in us, growing us into more faithful, more generous disciples. What it all really comes down to is not how many cards end up in this box this morning—don’t tell our Finance Committee I said that! It’s about how many doors are opened, how many hearts are converted to deeper service and praise. As we come forward, are responding to the knock.

Look up at the window again. As Ron observes, the face of Christ is filled with compassion and patience. He is not distracted or put off by our hesitation. He is earnest in his waiting. He will wait as long as we need. And then he’ll knock again.

This morning we have an opportunity to say “YES” and invite Christ to come in. We are asking him to consecrate our time, our talents, our service, our memories, our hopes, rendering them holy and precious to God, dedicating it all to a cause much bigger than ourselves, consecrating the gift of our life, the gift of generosity, and the gift of the mission to which God calls us.

Who will hear our YES!?! Generations to come, the Psalmist sings. Who will hear our YES!?! Those whose homes have been washed away. Who will hear our YES!?! Those whose hope has grown dim. Who will hear our YES!?! All who long for new life within and a new life of joy and peace for all. Who will hear our YES!?! Christ himself will hear, and come into our hearts and claim us forever. And all the angels in heaven will rejoice!  
Won’t you join me in saying YES!!

Notes:

Ron Theile. *Our Sanctuary—Symbols of Hope*. First United Methodist Church of Santa Monica, 2017.

Luis Bush. *The YES Effect: Accepting God’s Invitation to Transform the World Around You*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2017.

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