



*“Living from our
“deeper yes” – the
key to simplicity”
Matthew 2:1-12
Epiphany Sunday
Jan. 6, 2008
Rev. Shelley Lavenne*

Over the holidays, a handful of us saw the movie, *Amazing Grace*. The movie’s title, comes from the song, we know all so well, written by John Newton, a former slave ship captain, after his conversion to Christianity.

While John Newton is depicted in the movie, it’s really the story of a man named William Wilberforce. He was an 18th century British Member of Parliament who fought to end the slave trade most of his life.

That persistence came from his faith. As a young man, Wilberforce was deeply affected by the influence of the Methodists. The same Methodists from whom our United Church was founded. He experienced a life-changing time when he realized the preciousness of life given to all of us. He cherished the dew in the morning, the beauty of a flower and that we – are all God’s creatures, animals and humans – all equal in God’s sight. So the movie depicts a man who loved a menagerie of animals – including a hare that lived in his home. And that any person with an empty stomach who came to his kitchen door, received a meal.

Wilberforce said a deep “yes” to the goodness of God. He knew God’s great love for him and all God’s creation. He said a deep, profound yes to the blessedness of all that God makes. So in learning about the slave trade and the treatment of black people kidnapped from Africa, he had to say a deep “no”.

Having experienced a great “yes” in God’s love for himself and others, he had to say “no” to slavery. No, to people being stolen from their homes and customs in Africa. No to ships overloaded with their human cargo. No, to the multitude of diseases and starvation that killed many of these people on the way to the Americas. No, to one human being owning another.

I hope more of us get a chance to see this movie, *Amazing Grace*. William Wilberforce is a wonderful role model for us. And the movie is a reminder of the heritage from which we come as United Church people. We come from these Methodists who knew well about saying yes, to God’s goodness. It was a profoundly, deep yes, to God and all their lives were to be spent nurturing, building upon that ‘deep yes.’”

Bring us back to this day and age. We’ve all seen those books and CDs around by Steven Covey. He wrote books like *The 7 Habits of Effective People*. He’s considered an effective living and time management guru. He says, if we know the deeper “yes” that burns inside of you, then you know what to say “no” to in life.¹

¹ Reference to Covey’s work from Bob Sitz’s “The Heart of Simple Living.” *Alban Institute Newsletter*. 2007-12-31.

It's a simple strategy for a simple life. When we know the deep profound yes within us, we know what to say "no" to in our lives.

So what is the deeper yes that burns inside you? We all need to remind ourselves what the deeper yes is for each of us. And the deeper yes that is within us as a church.

I know for me the deeper yes is the love found in God. As a minister, I want people to know they are beloved and loved by God. There is too much in this world that tells us we are less than nothing. Those things we say "no" to. I know many people need the healing love of the Spirit – the one that washes over us and calls us blessed. Healed lives are lives lived saying "yes" to God.

There are times when forces that are much lesser than "yes" niggle at me. Even if I am a minister. Why are we bothering with this church stuff. Does society really need us? I know each us can find on the internet or on TV, spiritual teachings and insights a lot more flashier than we might do on a Sunday morning. These thoughts, they can niggle at me, prod me, discourage me. Maybe you also know such disturbing, anxiety-provoking thoughts, too.

But when I ground myself in the deeper "Yes" that I know within me -- those doubts have to melt away. What is stronger than the love of God? Nothing. What is stronger than the love, mercy and forgiveness we know in God? What is stronger than a group of people who know the love of God and share it amongst themselves and the community and world beyond? Nothing! Absolutely nothing is stronger than the love we know in Christ Jesus.

We know that also because of our own stories of faith and those ones like William Wilberforce that fill our history books. The story of the Magi – people who struck out a long distance because of a star. These are all stories of people who knew the larger "yes" deep within them and lived their lives out of that "yes", saying no to anything less than the love of God.

The video I showed before the sermon – we all know it's a tongue-in-check way of looking at resolutions. You know by the smiles on the faces of the actors that they know their words are contrary to any Biblical principle they've been told.

But the smiles are also because we all know how we can get distracted when we don't concentrate on the greater "yes" we know. And when we get distracted – this is what happens...

Words from "This Year" video – Worship House Media

This year, I'll spend less time with God.

I will hide my faith from my co-workers.

This year, I'll spend more....and give less to my church)

I will read the Bible as little as possible.

I will remain silent when I know I should speak.

This year, This year,

This year, I will not share my faith with my best friend.

This year, I will shirk leadership responsibility every chance I get.

I will continue to justify my bad behaviour...

And give God my leftovers.

This year, This year,

This year, I will let the busyness of life squeeze God out.

The video's about how we get distracted from God.

But when we focus our lives entirely on that burning "Yes" within us -- the love of God -- we don't get distracted. God gets all of us, not our leftovers. And when you think of it, simple living is another name for the Good News. When we focus on God, we know "freedom, joy, mission, creativity, courage." All of these Gospel words become our lives. AMEN.