

Moderator's Easter Message 2016



God says, "Yes!"

Sometimes when you know a story so well, you read it backwards knowing how the story ends. Easter is like that. It is a story of three days of violence, suffering, rejection, denial and then against all odds, resurrection to new life. Easter is often told as a story of two halves – the cross and the resurrection.

But, what if it was one story with the title "God says, 'Yes!'”?

God says "yes" to suffering.

In the midst of suffering, most people ask, "Where is God?", as if God is somehow absent. Jesus cries the words of Psalm 22, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" But Jesus also knew the words of Psalm 23 "For thou art with me (even in the valley of the shadow of death)". Could it be that in our experience of suffering (the abandonment of God), we experience the presence of God?

God says "yes" to our humanity.

The Easter story makes no attempt to gloss over the flaws of our humanity. It is not hard to see your own face in the mirror of scripture: jealousy, manipulation, deception, doubt, fear, confusion, courage, compassion, betrayal and grief – it's all there. You cannot turn your face away from your own image. God doesn't.

God says "yes" to love as the greatest power the world has ever seen. Violence and injustice are rendered powerless in the face of love.

God says "yes" to forgiveness.

Freedom is found in forgiveness. Imagine being forgiven even for what we do not know we need forgiveness for – amazing! Pay it forward; forgive and you have been forgiven; it is the pathway to freedom.

God says "yes" to the witness of women. It was the women who reported the facts of the resurrection!

God says "yes" to beginning again. God does not give up on people, even in betrayal and denial – astonishing – a chance to begin again. God is a God of second and third and fourth and fifth and... chances. Begin again.

God says "yes" to life!

Death is not the final word; life is!

Easter: God says, "Yes"!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Andrew".

Andrew Norton
Moderator Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand