

**Theme: Antidotes for an Out of Control Life**

**“Remember Rule No. 6”**

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber

January 14-15, 2012 at First United Methodist Church, Durango

**Exodus 18:13-26**

*The next day, Moses took his seat to hear the people’s disputes against each other. They waited before him from morning till evening. When Moses’ father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing for the people, he asked, “What are you really accomplishing here? Why are you trying to do all this alone while everyone stands around you from morning till evening?” Moses replied, “Because the people come to me to get a ruling from God. When a dispute arises, they come to me, and I am the one who settles the case between the quarreling parties. I inform the people of God’s decrees and give them his instructions.” “This is not good!” Moses’ father-in-law exclaimed. “You’re going to wear yourself out—and the people, too. This job is too heavy a burden for you to handle all by yourself. Now listen to me, and let me give you a word of advice, and may God be with you. You should continue to be the people’s representative before God, bringing their disputes to him. Teach them God’s decrees, and give them his instructions. Show them how to conduct their lives. But select from all the people some capable, honest men who fear God and hate bribes. Appoint them as leaders over groups of one thousand, one hundred, fifty, and ten. They should always be available to solve the people’s common disputes, but have them bring the major cases to you. Let the leaders decide the smaller matters themselves. They will help you carry the load, making the task easier for you. If you follow this advice, and if God commands you to do so, then you will be able to endure the pressures, and all these people will go home in peace.” Moses listened to his father-in-law’s advice and followed his suggestions. He chose capable men from all over Israel and appointed them as leaders over the people. He put them in charge of groups of one thousand, one hundred, fifty, and ten. These men were always available to solve the people’s common disputes. They brought the major cases to Moses, but they took care of the smaller matters themselves.*

**VIDEO      Sermon Starter for Remember Rule Number 6**

**SLIDE      Remember Rule Number 6**

Have you ever felt like that young man? Have you ever felt like things just keep getting dumped on you and you feel like you can’t say, “No”? You say, "Yes"

and you say, "Yes" and pretty soon you feel like a doormat because everybody is laying more things on you. You feel like you have to say, "Yes," and then you feel overwhelmed because you can't even see what is ahead of you because of everything that is piled up in front of you.

This type of lifestyle has overwhelmed many of us in this community and in our congregation and in our country and so we are doing a sermon series on how we might find antidotes for an out-of-control life. We get used to saying, "Yes," to everything and we say, "No," to virtually nothing and as a result we don't do anything very well anymore. We are overloaded and overcommitted and overwhelmed and burned out. Even those of you who feel like you are not overloaded or overcommitted often end up living lives like you are. You get caught up in the culture of hurry and are frantically running from here to there and everywhere.

This sermon series is about helping us to slow down a bit and as we continue today in the second week of the series I want to invite you to take out of your bulletin your Message Notes and your Meditation Moments. There is the Scripture passage we read for today at the top and then some blank lines for you to write down some things you would like to remember from today's message. I hope that you will hear something that you want to reflect upon later. I have been praying that God will speak to each one of us during this sermon series and I believe that when God does speak, it is good to write those things down so we can remember them later. On the backside you will find daily Scripture passages that I want to encourage you to read on your own. Take 10 min. a day to read and pray over these and to think more deeply and I believe that you will be blessed and energized by saying, "Yes," to that daily rhythm.

As we began last week in this sermon series I mentioned several resources that I have been reading and one of them is this book, Addicted to Hurry: Spiritual Strategies for Slowing Down by Kirk Byron Jones.

**SLIDE            Addicted to Hurry**

In this book Jones recognizes that when we are overcommitted and overburdened and in a hurry all the time there are four things that we no longer do very well. When we are in a hurry we no longer:

**SLIDE            See Clearly            Listen Carefully**  
**Think Deeply            Enjoy life fully**

We miss these things when we are constantly in a hurry, and today I want

to add one more to that list. When we are in a hurry we no longer:

## **SLIDE        Serve God Effectively**

When we are constantly overcommitted and stretched we don't have the ability to serve God. So, today we want to talk about saying, "Yes," sometimes and saying, "No," sometimes.

We are going to begin by talking about saying, "No." I want to give you permission and help you think about why you say, "Yes," when you should be saying, "No." We are going to talk about why and when and how we can say, "No," and then we will talk about why there are times that we have to say, "Yes."

I know that everyone of us in this room struggles at times with saying, "No." I find this true my own life as I'm constantly saying "Yes," to more than I can possibly do and I know that many of you struggle with this as well. Many of you have shared with me your thoughts on this during the past week.

***One man said, "I don't particularly struggle with this but my wife does. My wife is constantly saying, 'Yes,' to everything and everybody except for me. She has no problem saying, 'No,' to me!"***

It may feel like that to us sometimes in our marriages and in our lives. One woman said this week in the, ***"The reason why I can't say, 'No,' is because for women there is a guilt when you say, 'No.' There is a reward in the, 'Yes.' We love being on the list of those who said, 'Yes,' and did that extra thing. Sadly, this results in more, 'No's,' to the things that make us better and that mean more in the grand scheme of things."***

One person said, ***"To say, 'No,' implies that you are selfish."***

Another person said, ***"I am afraid that if I say, 'No,' to someone they will not like me anymore."***

One person noted to me this week what many of us feel, ***"I don't say, 'No,' because if I don't do it then how will it get done?"***

All of these are a part of why we often say, "Yes," when we feel like saying, "No." I noted in my own life I often say, "Yes," because I like to be needed, and I secretly need to be needed. I think it might make a difference. It makes me feel important because I like being around other people who were doing important things. Someone may notice and may affirm me if I do this thing I am asked to do. Maybe I will be left out if I don't say, "Yes." Maybe they will never ask me again to do something if I say, "No," to them right now!

These are all reasons that I said, "Yes," to something when I should've said, "No."

I have here a box that represents my life. You have your own box. Our boxes have 168 hours a week in them, no more and no less. If this box represents my life then I have 168 hours a week, 52 weeks a year. Once you fill this up you can't get anything else in here. I have things in this box that represent my life.

There are certain things that you have to have, like sleep. This pillow is my favorite pillow because it is one of those form fitting pillows that shapes to your head. I have a hard time sleeping without. I have learned that I can sleep 5 to 6 hours a night and sometimes less. I may not be very functional the next day but I can do it.

I have to eat but I have learned that I don't have to sit down to eat. I don't even have to have time to eat breakfast cereal. I can put a Pop Tart in the toaster and take it with me in the car and eat it while I am driving.

Of course I have my family who are represented by this picture. I have to care for them and take time to be with them. This cross represents my faith which is buried here in a box somewhere.

This Bible represents my desire to listen for God's voice and to read the Scripture. It often is buried at the bottom of the box as well. My job is represented by this chalice and plate which were given to me at my ordination. I like to build and repair things and I like to work for organizations like Habitat for Humanity so I have this hammer to represent that.

I have a picture of my friends while we are playing golf and I have this golf club to represent one of the things that I like to do. I have a book and I have my iPad which represents reading and being online. I love to go to movies and so I have one of those in here. I like to swim and to play basketball and I like to hike and I like to walk our dogs so I need room for all those in my box.

My box is jam-packed full. I can squeeze little things in here or there but I am at the point where I can't squeeze anything else in. The only way I can really do anything else in this box is if I start taking something out of it. It just won't work unless I learn to take something out before I put some new things in.

Here's the problem. When I am busy and saying, "Yes," to new things then things fall out of the box. The first things to fall out of the box are reading for enjoyment and exercise. The other things that fall out are the things that bring me pleasure like watching a movie or walking the dogs. After a while the friends go

because I have crammed in so many other things there is no more room for them and I live far away from some of them so we drift apart.

My Scripture reading happens in a hurry because I don't have a lot of time anymore. I try to read my Meditation Moments every day but I have looked at them all before I gave them out to you so I tend to skim through them. Most of the time I am in a hurry and I read it fast. One of my mentors once said that, "God speaks slower than a Texan." God speaks slowly and the problem is that we listen fast. When we are listening fast, we don't hear God. This happens in my life when I read Scripture and I don't hear a thing because I am reading too fast. I am in a hurry and I have 1 million things that I have to get done before noon. I might get around to reading Scripture but I miss the opportunity to hear God.

I don't serve God effectively when my box is full and I'm in a hurry. I finally had to resign from one board that I serve on because I hadn't been to a meeting in over a year. When my box continues to be overfull then I don't have time for my family either and they get left by the wayside.

We all tend to live in this place at some point in our lives, where we can't quite figure out how to get everything to fit in the box. As I was preparing for this series of sermons I was reminded of something that someone said to me a number of years ago that I had forgotten. I read it again this last week in an online article I received that is part of a daily blog. It is very simple and yet very profound. It is self-evident and I know you probably know this but I want to remind you of it and I want you to write it down.

**SLIDE      Every "yes" to something is a "no" to something else.**

When your life is full the only way you can say "yes" to one thing is to say "no" to something else. The question we have to ask every time we agreed to do something is this: What am I saying "no" to by giving this "yes"? Is that really what I want to say "no" to?

Someone will say to me, "I just need 15 minutes of your time."

I then say, "Great, I can give you 15 minutes of my time."

Here's the problem. I have never had a 15 minute meeting and I know that. By the time I meet with someone for 15 minutes and has become an hour and that is 45 minutes that I had not planned on which was supposed to go to something else.

Last year I was asked to serve on a board that I really believe in. It has great people on it and a few of them are friends. When they called to ask me to do that

they told me that the board only met five times a year for a few hours and I could join them via Skype. I thought it sounded like a great opportunity until I realized that if I said "yes" to those five times a year I would have to say "no" to something else. It may very well be that being on that board is the most important thing I could do, but if it is not the most important thing and there is something else I can do with that time that would be more valuable. I have to say "no" to that request in order to say "yes" to that more important thing.

Last week we talked about thinning out our lives so we could have margin and the idea is to make sure that your box is not so jam packed full that when something comes up which is an immediate need you can say "yes" to it because you have that time to spare. If it is just something that comes up one time that might be easier to put that in the box, but if it is something that is going to happen on a regular basis then you have to empty something out-of-the-box otherwise you won't have the margin or the room or the bandwidth to be able to say "yes" to those things that you are feeling called to do. If your box is full then you have to say "no" to something so that you can say "yes" to that new thing. That is just the way it works. One of the tasks that we have in our lives is to make conscious choices.

I find in my life I end up unconsciously saying "no" to my kids or to my family or to reading Scripture or to spending time in prayer or to doing something that is really important because there was something else immediately which was asked of me and I said "yes."

If you really want to get a handle on this idea of saying "no" then it might be good to remember something that Benjamin Zander, the conductor of the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra, writes about in his excellent book called:

**SLIDE      The Art of Possibility**

Zander talks about remembering Rule Number 6 in his book and in his leadership talks.

**SLIDE      Remember Rule No. 6**

He tells the story of two Prime Ministers who are meeting in Europe at the height of World War II. In the middle of their meeting one of the staff members from the Prime Minister's cabinet in whose office they were meeting comes bursting into the room. He was crazed and out of his mind as he stammered, "You won't believe this! You can't imagine what is just happened! You have to hear this and you have to do something now!"

The Prime Minister looks at him calmly and simply says, "Peter, Peter, remember rule number six."

Peter says, "Oh, of course. Thank you for reminding me." He calmed down immediately and he quietly walked out the door.

A few minutes later a woman walks into their meeting and she is almost screaming she is so upset. She just had a phone call that she had to relay to the Prime Minister and she says to him, "You won't believe the conversation I just had. You have to hear this because it is making me crazy!"

The Prime Minister, he says to her, "Maria, remember rule number six."

Maria sighs, "Yes, I forgot...remember rule number six." She then walked calmly from the room.

Another staff member ran by Maria as she was leaving and he was the most upset of all. His hands were on his head and his eyeballs were popping out and he couldn't even seem to speak he was so worked up.

The Prime Minister simply put his hand up to me and said, "Remember rule number six. Can you remember rule number six?"

The man responded, "Yes Prime Minister, thank you." He left the room quietly and in a much better space than he had just entered.

Finally, the other prime minister says to him, "What is this rule number six? How does this work? Your staff keeps coming in hysterically and then they leave calmly after you have reminded them of rule number six. How do you get them to calm down so quickly?"

"Rule number six is very simple and I make all of my staff memorize it: Don't take yourself so darn seriously."

The visiting prime minister says, "That's right. Don't take yourself so darn seriously. What are the other five rules?"

He replied with a smile, "There aren't any. That is the only one."

I don't know about you but many times I take myself to darn seriously. Somebody asks me to do something I think, "I am the only person who could do this and so I have to say 'yes'." So I say 'yes' because I think that somehow I can actually save the world by doing this thing. It's like the world is not going to go on if I don't show up at the board meeting or be a part of this project.

I get asked to go speak at a conference because they say they really need

me to do that and I think, "I guess I better do that because if I don't they might cancel the event!" Is that really how it works?

Every time I say "yes" to some special event or board then someone else who would have found it a blessing doesn't get a chance to do that thing. I go when it's a bummer for me because I regret having given up time and I think, "Great, here is one more thing I have to do." But there is somebody else who probably would've gone, "Wow, guess what I get to do?" That could've happened if I had only said, "No," and then they could've said, "Yes." Sometimes every time that we say "yes" we robbed someone else of an opportunity.

The Bible is filled with people who have struggled with this. One of them is none other than Moses himself. Moses is called by God to lead the children of Israel out of slavery in Egypt. He leads them out of Egypt and through the Red Sea into the wilderness and to Mount Sinai where he receives the 10 Commandments and the law. He has in his mind that he is the only person that God can speak to and he is the only person who can interpret the law that has been given. He has taken himself so darn seriously as a leader and what begins to happen is that he tries to do everything. In trying to do everything he is doing nothing very well. Every day he ends up with lines of people outside of his tent who were waiting to see the great Moses because they need his permission or him to settle a dispute or to give a judgment on an issue.

Moses woke up every day and he felt his heart burdened even more than the day before. I don't know if this is ever happened to you, or if you have woken up some days and you feel sick to your stomach before the day even begins because you know that there is no way you can possibly do all the stuff on your schedule by eleven o'clock that night-even if you work straight through. Moses wakes up with that feeling every single day.

Finally, Moses gets some wisdom from his father-in-law Jethro who comes to visit. Jethro sees the people lined up around the tent every day and he sees Moses trying to deal with each person personally. Speaking on behalf of God, Jethro says to Moses the same word that I hear from God on occasion. "Moses, you're an idiot." The Bible doesn't actually use that word but here's what it does say in the text we read today. From Exodus 18 we read the following.

**SLIDE**      ***The next day, Moses took his seat to hear the people's disputes against each other. They waited before him from morning till evening. When Moses' father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing for the people, he asked, "What are you really accomplishing here?"***



***Why are you trying to do all this alone while everyone stands around you from morning till evening?" Moses replied, "Because the people come to me to get a ruling from God. When a dispute arises, they come to me, and I am the one who settles the case between the quarreling parties. I inform the people of God's decrees and give them his instructions."***

***"This is not good! (You're an idiot!)" Moses' father-in-law exclaimed. "You're going to wear yourself out—and the people, too. This job is too heavy a burden for you to handle all by yourself."***

Jethro is speaking wisdom to his son-in-law. Can you imagine what Moses might've done when he heard these words from his father-in-law? My guess is that he gives Jethro all of the reasons why he has to be the one to do all these things. "You don't understand Jethro. I am God's man and nobody can do this quite like I can. It is easier for me just to do it rather than train somebody else do it." I have no doubt that Moses had all of the excuses and reasons that we give when we don't want to give something away.

I can relate to that. There are certain things that I love to do as a pastor but I had to give those things up as the church has grown over the last 10 years. I couldn't keep doing everything because the box was breaking. Let me just give you one example and that is leading worship.

I used to think that I have to do all of the prayers and all of the announcements and all of the other things in worship because that is what pastors are supposed to do. I love doing that but when we add a Saturday night service and then another Sunday morning service and I am doing for services on a weekend I am worn out if I do everything at all the services. Sometimes I would forget parts of the service because I would get lost after doing two or three services. I had my mind that I was the only person who could say the prayers just right or do the announcements in just the right way.

Of the hundreds of people in this church no one could do the announcements or say the prayers—like you need a master of divinity to speak in front of people. Somehow I believed that and it was so hard to give that up. Maybe at first the worship leaders were nervous and it does take some practice but after a while they have gotten even better than I am because they are fresh. Recently I had lunch with someone who loves being a worship leader. If I was still doing this, then he would never have the chance to explore this calling and to experience the joy of serving.

The same is true of how we do pastoral care in this church. Roger and I love to be able to visit with you in the hospital or care for you when you're going through a really tough time in your life. But we would kill ourselves if we had to do this for everyone who needed care in the church. There is no way possible that we can take care of all of you and so we have trained Stephen Ministers over the past few months and in two weeks we are going to commission them and they have a calling to be there for you when you are hurting. They have gone through 50 hours of training so they can meet with you when you're going through an illness or divorce or loss of a job. They are great at listening, probably even better than Roger or myself, and they love the chance to pray for you.

When Roger and I think we have to do all of the visitation and all of the care we are robbing those people of their ministry and we are not doing what God wants, which is to raise you up as the Saints of God called to serve God's people. This is exactly what Jethro told Moses.

***Now listen to me, and let me give you a word of advice, and may God be with you...select from all the people some capable, honest men (and women) who fear God and hate bribes (people of character). Appoint them as leaders over groups of one thousand, one hundred, fifty, and ten. They should always be available to solve the people's common disputes, but have them bring the major cases to you. Let the leaders decide the smaller matters themselves. They will help you carry the load, making the task easier for you. If you follow this advice, and if God commands you to do so, then you will be able to endure the pressures, and all these people will go home in peace."***

In essence, Jethro is saying to Moses, "Don't take yourself so darn seriously!" There are other people who can do this. You still need to be the leader and handle the important cases but you need to learn to give part of this ministry away.

This is one of the questions that we ask of our staff people here at First United Methodist Church -"What are the things that only I can do?"

You will find that it is a lot less than what you think it is and let me suggest to you that you use the 80% rule. If someone can do it 80% as good as you then give it away and let them do it because they will never do it is good as you anyway. The reality is that they will probably do a better! You have to ask yourself this question, "What are the things that I must do and how can I do them well?"

What are the things that other people can do and take care of and what are the things that I don't really need to do it all?"

Those are the kind of questions that we have to wrestle with. In order to do that you have to figure out what your purpose in life is.

**SLIDE        What is your mission?**

For most of my life I have lived by a set of priorities. I have a list for my life and I have a list for my job here as the Senior Pastor of this church. Those priorities are a good place to start but in order to say "no" to some things and "yes" to others you have to figure out why you are really here. We have to ask ourselves, "What is my life about? What are the gifts that I have? What is God calling me to do?"

Priorities are nice but I think that it helps to have a mission statement for your life as well. I remember doing this several years ago and I realized that I put my mission statement away. So I thought I would get my mission statement out now and share it with you as you could see what it looks like. The first part of this comes from Micah 6:8

**SLIDE        My purpose is to seek justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God;**

**SLIDE        to love my family;**

**SLIDE        to lead the church (local and denominational) to fulfill its mission;**

**SLIDE        and to enjoy the life God has given me.**

I added that last one as I was looking at that this week. I think God wants you to actually enjoy life while you are serving him. Life is not meant to be just work and work and work. That was the point of last week's sermon as we talked about Sabbath because God's intention is that you actually enjoy the life that God has given to you by remembering who you are and renewing your heart and restoring your spirit through rest.

Those of you who come out of the Presbyterian or the reformed tradition might remember the words of the Westminster catechism which says: "**What is the chief end of man? The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.**"

We are meant to enjoy our lives and to love God and to love our families and to love our neighbors, fulfilling the call that God has placed upon our lives for our vocations. With that mission in mind we are more able to say "no" to some

things and "yes" other things.

I have taught you so far that it is important to say "no" to something and that is important. We have to say "no" so would you practice that with me? Just say, "No!" I will count to three and we can say together. One, two, three...

**SLIDE        No!**

God is giving you permission in our Scripture text for today from Exodus. Jesus gives us permission to say "no." I'm telling you as your pastor that you have got to say "no" to more things than you have been saying "no" to or the box is going to break.

But if I leave you there than I have done a great disservice, because life as God intended it is not about saying "no" but about saying "no" to some things so you can say "yes" to the greater things. Remember this commercial from a few years back?

**VIDEO        No Commercial**

**SLIDE        Saying "no" so you can say "yes" to what's important.**

Sometimes you have to say "yes." Several times a year I preached to you about the time Jesus was approached by a lawyer who says to him, "Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Eternal life begins here and now and he continues into the afterlife and forever with God. This lawyer wants to know how to inherit that kind of a life. In essence it asking this question, "What do I have to say 'yes' to and what can I say 'no' to?"

Jesus says to him, "You are a teacher of the law. You know. What does the Scripture say?"

The lawyer responds, "To love God with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength; and to love your neighbor as you love yourself."

Jesus says, "Do these things and you will live."

This is meant to be a guiding mission in your life. Almost everything else fits underneath these but the man comes back with the question, "Well, then who is my neighbor?"

You understand what he is asking. He wants to know, "Who do I have to specifically say 'yes' to and who can I say 'no' to?" He is looking for Jesus permission to say "yes" and "no."

That is a legitimate question and Jesus says to him, "Let me illustrate this

with the story so you can know every day who you have to say 'yes' to. There was a certain man who was going from Jerusalem to Jericho."

This is a 15 mile hike that is downhill and through rugged terrain which can be treacherous and would be filled with bandits and robbers during the first century. It takes about eight hours to make this trip by foot with a couple of stops for water and rest.

"While this man was walking to Jericho he was accosted by thieves. They took everything that he had and they beat him. They stole his clothing as well as his property and he was stripped naked and left for dead on the side of the road. A priest passes by and he sees the man on the other side of the road and the priest says to himself, 'I just have to say "no" to some things. My box is pretty much full already. It is possible there is somebody waiting to attack me if I stop to help. It could be a trick. Or it could be that he is dead and I will become ritually unclean if I touch him and I won't be able to go to my meeting. If I stop to help them that I might be late and I have this really important thing that I have to get done down Jericho.' For all of these reasons he said, 'no.'"

"A Levite then passed by. (The Levites were the tribe of Israel that supported the priests. They were religious workers and surely this religious worker will stop and help, right?) He sees the man but he says, 'I just have to say "no" to some things. I can't say "yes" to everything. My life is so overloaded and so overcrowded that I really can't stop and help him. I am running late and I'm busy."

For whatever reason he has no margin and he can't stop and he has rationalized for himself that he doesn't need to stop. They both go by and the man is still dying on the side of the road when the Samaritan comes along. Samaritans were considered unorthodox and unclean. Some Jews in the day of Jesus considered them heretics. They had adopted some of the Jewish practices but they were despised by many of the Jewish people.

Jesus continues and says, "The Samaritan saw the man naked and dying on the side of the road and his heart instantly knows that he has to say 'yes.' He knows that there is something else in Jericho which he will have to say 'no' to in order to say 'yes' to this because this is what really matters. This is what life is about and what it means to love your neighbor as you love yourself. He stops and bandages the man's wounds, places them on a donkey with his own robe around him. He takes into the inn in Jericho and he provides for his food and for his shelter and for his medical care."

Jesus says, "Now which of these do you think was the neighbor to the man in need?"

The lawyer responds, "Well of course it was the Samaritan."

Jesus commands and then to, "go and do likewise."

Jesus paints a picture for us that God is demanding that there are times when we must say "yes." The only way we can say "yes" to those urgent times that God calls us is if we say "no" to something else. The Samaritan understood this and lived out.

Let me ask you a question. When the Samaritan stopped to help the man in need, when he bandaged up his wounds, when he took him into Jericho and he paid for his medical care and provided for him, how do you think this Samaritan felt when he left the hotel? Do you think he thought to himself, "What a drag? I feel awful. This set me back two days of my time and a month's wages. I feel miserable after having helped this guy."

Do you think that is how he felt? You know that is not how he felt. I think he felt fully alive. I think he felt like, "I just got to be a part of something that God is doing and I feel energized by it. I feel ready to go out and do more because I felt God working through me. It was awesome and I was made for this!"

There are some things that we say "yes" to and they drain us. That is life and sometimes our work is like that. But when we love our neighbor as we love ourselves, when we are engaged in serving our fellow human beings, it may not always be easy but we always walk away feeling, "Wow, I feel like that is what I was made for."

We find that something that was in our minds, seemed like it was going to be a drain, actually energizing us. That is how it works in the kingdom of God. It is counterintuitive, but when we give ourselves to doing God's work and being his hands and his voice because we made margin by giving up other things, we find life.

This is Martin Luther King Jr. weekend and as I was wrapping up this sermon and thinking about this weekend I found myself thinking about the 45 members of our church, adults and youth, who will be giving up two weeks and spending thousands of dollars of their own money to go on mission trips to Kenya this April to serve orphans half a world away. Why would they give that much time and energy to go do that and to serve those that don't look like us?

For some of us is not possible to go to Africa because we don't have the

resources or the time and I thought of the more than 20 members of our congregation who have been down to the Shiprock United Methodist ministry in New Mexico, working with our Native American brothers and sisters to provide a playground and do other building improvements in one of the poorest areas in the four corners. You make me so proud to be your pastor because as you give of yourself to do these kinds of ministries you are saying "no" to that extra income and that week of vacation in order to say "yes" to something much more meaningful. I was talking with one of the team members who went to Shiprock and it was their first mission trip experience and they said to me something very powerful.

**SLIDE          Shiprock Mission**

***"I went thinking that I was going to work but instead I felt energized. I felt like I was doing what God made me to do for the first time in a long time."***

I find that when we create time to love God and to love our neighbor and we create time to be in ministry and to serve the poor and when we create time to work for justice by saying "no" to some other things we find that "yes" recharges us and renews us and helps us remember who we are and what it means to be authentically human.

There are moments when you have to say "yes" but you can't do that unless you first say "no" to something else.

I want to end with this. One of my mentors from the past 15 years retired early this last year to help care for his wife who is dealing with cancer. Kent Millard was the senior pastor of St. Luke's United Methodist Church in Indianapolis, Indiana for more than 15 years. He's a great guy and I have met him at several conferences and workshops and have read several of his books.

In one of his sermons he describes his experiences with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The year was 1965 and Dr. King was in Selma, Alabama marching on the county courthouse because the officials in Selma would not allow African-Americans to register to vote. Dr. King preached about this injustice and he sent out a call to religious leaders across the country to join him as they marched on the courthouse. Around 50 pastors showed up along with a few rabbis to march in Selma arm in arm with the African-American leaders and mostly churchgoers of that community who participated in the march. They came to the courthouse day after day, demanding the right for all people to be able to register to vote.

There was a pastor from Boston named James Reeb.

**SLIDE          James Reeb**

Reverend James Reeb came from Boston and marched with Dr. Martin Luther King one day as they went to the courthouse. After the March he went to a café in Selma and when he came out the Klansmen were waiting for him. They beat him even as he lay helpless on the ground. Two days later he died of a brain hemorrhage. After that most of the pastors went back to their hometowns.

Dr. King sent word to his professor at Boston University theological seminary which is a Methodist school. He had gotten his PhD from Boston University and sent word back to his professor telling them that they were working to assure voting rights for the people of Selma, Alabama, "Do you think any of your seminary students would come down and join us? The pastors have all left and we could use some support."

He announced this to his class of predominantly white seminary students who were 23 or 24 years old because it was a first-year class. Kent Millard was in that class. They have 1 million actual excuses not to go. They are in Boston and the pastor who was just killed was from Boston. They are religious leaders just like the pastor. Saying "yes" was not like driving down the Shiprock, New Mexico or going to an orphanage outside of Nairobi, Kenya. Saying "yes" meant you could die. Saying "yes" meant driving to somewhere you had never been before and risking everything.

When the professor asked if any of his students would be willing to go, 22 of them raised their hands and those young people traveled all the way down to Selma, Alabama. Kent tells what happened when they arrived and says the first thing was that each of them got training in how to respond if you were beaten or accosted by a mob or the Klan. There were two young African-American men who took the group of students and said, "We need to teach you what to do if they start hitting you in the head." These two young African-American men were Andrew Young and Jesse Jackson.

They told these white seminary students, "When they start striking you on the head. Cover your hands over your head and fall to the ground and curl up in a ball that way you can protect your skull. They will break your hands but you will survive. The rest of you need to collapse on top of them and each person does this as a group and then they can't hurt anyone of you more than the group. You may be hurt but all of you will survive and make it through if you stay in a group this way." That gives a whole new image to what it means to be the body of



Christ, doesn't it?

When they were done training them on how to deal with the verbal abuse and the potential beatings, an older African-American woman came up to Kent and said, "Sonny, you look really scared."

He said, "Yes ma'am, I am really scared."

She said, "You come and walk with me, arm in arm, and I'll protect you and you'll be okay."

They walked out that day, along with the people of Selma, and marched once more the courthouse. Once more and African-Americans were turned away from being able to register to vote. Kent said that he remembered the prayer that was prayed on the steps of the courthouse that day with all of these people hurling insults and throwing things at them. He remembers the prayer of one of the pastors:

**SLIDE      *God, we pray for these people who live here, that their hearts of stone might be turned into hearts of flesh and they might learn to love their neighbors as they love themselves, in Jesus' name.***

Eventually people were allowed to vote in Selma because there were people who said "no" to something else so they could say "yes" to what was important. Kent said, "I left Selma, Alabama and my life was forever changed because I had said 'yes.'"

Went back to Selma, Alabama four years ago and was teaching at a retreat for 350 United Methodist pastors. At the end of the retreat he told this story and one of the pastors came up to him and said:

***I need to tell you that I was in the crowd that day hurling insults at you and the marchers. I heard that prayer that was prayed on the steps,***

**SLIDE      *"Lord, take away their hearts of stone and give them hearts of flesh,"***

***...and Jesus came into my life that moment and I have never been the same since. I want to thank you for having the courage as a young man to march on the streets in my city and pray that prayer for us.***

In order to say "yes" to those opportunities you have to say "no" to others. I am inviting you and begging you and challenging you to look through your life carefully. Figure out what doesn't have to be in the box so when those moments come along your answer can be, "Yes Lord, here I am, send me."

Would you put your hands on your lap like this, open faced with palms up like you are going to give something to God? Let's bow in prayer together.

**SLIDE          Prayer**

I would like you to say these words quietly under your breath if you are willing. You can whisper them to God as your prayer.

*O God, I offer myself to you. I say "yes" to your call.*

*Give me the boldness and courage I need to live for you.*

*Help me be clear about my priorities.*

*And give me the strength to say "no" so that when you need me I might be free to say "yes."*

*In Jesus' name, Amen.*

**Sermon Series: Antidotes For An Out-of-Control Life**

**Sermon Title: "Remember Rule #6"**

**Exodus 18:13-26**

*The next day, Moses took his seat to hear the people's disputes against each other. They waited before him from morning till evening. When Moses' father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing for the people, he asked, "What are you really accomplishing here? Why are you trying to do all this alone while everyone stands around you from morning till evening?" Moses replied, "Because the people come to me to get a ruling from God. When a dispute arises, they come to me, and I am the one who settles the case between the quarreling parties. I inform the people of God's decrees and give them his instructions." "This is not good!" Moses' father-in-law exclaimed. "You're going to wear yourself out—and the people, too. This job is too heavy a burden for you to handle all by yourself. Now listen to me, and let me give you a word of advice, and may God be with you. You should continue to be the people's representative before God, bringing their disputes to him. Teach them God's decrees, and give them his instructions. Show them how to conduct their lives. But select from all the people some capable, honest men who fear God and hate bribes. Appoint them as leaders over groups of one thousand, one hundred, fifty, and ten. They should always be available to solve the people's common disputes, but have them bring the major cases to you. Let the leaders decide the smaller matters themselves. They will help you carry the load, making the task easier for you. If*

*you follow this advice, and if God commands you to do so, then you will be able to endure the pressures, and all these people will go home in peace.” Moses listened to his father-in-law’s advice and followed his suggestions. He chose capable men from all over Israel and appointed them as leaders over the people. He put them in charge of groups of one thousand, one hundred, fifty, and ten. These men were always available to solve the people’s common disputes. They brought the major cases to Moses, but they took care of the smaller matters themselves.*

**Things I’d like to remember from today’s sermon:**

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**Meditation Moments**

**Monday, January 16** – Read Exodus 18:13-26. Task: lead a throng of ex-slaves safely through the Sinai desert. They weren’t organized; had just one clear leader. They hadn’t learned to work out even minor conflicts— their slave masters had run everything. Moses found himself ironing out every little problem the people had in person— until his father-in-law wisely told him, “What you are doing is not good.”

- It was good that Moses took his role as leader seriously. “The people come to me to seek God’s will,” he said. But his father-in-law was God’s instrument to remind him that he wasn’t called to be a solo act, handling everything himself. What solo tasks do you carry right now? Look prayerfully at what parts of them you could share with others.
- Exodus 2:16, 3:1 and 18:1 called Moses’ father-in-law “the priest of Midian.” Moses was “sheltered, married, employed, and counseled [by] a priest of Midian.” (*Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*) Midian’s religion probably differed from Israel’s. Are you, like Moses, open to God’s wisdom

even if it comes through a source you didn't expect?

**Tuesday, January 17** – Read 1 Kings 19:3-16, 18. Through Elijah, God's power routed the pagan priests of Baal (the story is in 1 Kings 18). Then, physically and mentally drained, Elijah ran from Jezebel's threat, and even asked God to kill him. God gave him rest and food, and listened to Elijah claim (twice) he was the last faithful person in Israel. God told him he was **not** alone, and gave him names to enlist to help him.

- God told Elijah he was not alone: "Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel." Elijah's fatigue distorted his point of view. He "had dismissed everyone's faith but his own and failed to appreciate ways in which God was at work." (*New Bible Commentary*) Have you ever felt alone, the way Elijah did? How can you get enough rest to be able to "see straight"? How can the faith and service of others give you strength for your own calling?
- Elijah also "made the mistake of thinking that he was...God's last and only hope" (*Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*). So God named his successor! Who are you investing yourself in to prepare them to fill your place when you aren't able to?

**Wednesday, January 18** – Read Matthew 20:20-28. This request must have seemed shrewd to James and John (and probably their mom, though Mark left her out when he told the story in Mark 10:35-45). "Thy **kingdom** come"—well, weren't "kingdoms" about seeking places of power? "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. There is no status-seeking Kingdom of Heaven. In my Kingdom, we serve.

- People knew in Jesus' day, and we know in ours, what power, privilege and importance look like. Down deep, most of us wish for some of the perks that go with power. But Jesus answer was succinct: "No so with you." Jesus came not to be served, but to serve. In what specific ways does living like Jesus change your approach to life?
- Jesus told James and John, "You will indeed drink from my cup." James was the first martyred apostle (Acts 12:2). On the other hand, Christian tradition says John lived a long life of service and writing. In what ways did John, as well as James, "drink from Jesus' cup"? In what ways has your life so far called on you to do that?

**Thursday, January 19** – Read Romans 12:3-8. Once Paul had ambitiously tried to single-handedly wipe out people he saw as God’s enemies. In Christ, he became a community-builder, one member of the inter-reliant “body of Christ.” “Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment,” he wrote. It wasn’t about him; it was about the good of the whole community.

- Scholar William Barclay wrote that to “think of yourself with sober judgment” means “an honest assessment of our capacities, without conceit or false modesty.” Which do you struggle with more: conceit (“I can do it all”) or false modesty (“I’m can’t do anything”)? What tools can God use to help you think of yourself with sober judgment?
- In our bodies one part does not envy or compete with another. Rather, as Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 12:26, “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.” Who have you known who lived out that spirit as a member of “the Body”? How can you more fully honor your own gifts and those of others?

**Friday, January 20** – Read Philippians 3:3-16. Paul had foes who said their “credentials” made their message truer than his. He could play the “credentials game” with the best of them, he said—but he didn’t. He used the strong term “garbage” (verse 8) to describe his human efforts, meaning he’d laid aside self-important status games. He didn’t care how people assessed him, as long as they learned to love Jesus.

- Paul didn’t just “talk humble;” he was. Some preached Christ, he said, “supposing they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice” (Philippians 1:17-18). What do you believe helped this strong, confident leader to make Jesus central, and himself a supporting cast member?
- Paul set aside ego about his views: “If on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained.” How easy or hard is it for you to deal that way with those who think differently from you?

**Saturday November 21** – Read Mark 1:21-39. The only person who might have ever had a right to feel he should (or could) carry “the weight of the world” was Jesus. But he didn’t! He drove out demons, healed a sick woman, and ministered to the whole town gathered at the door of the house. But in the morning, without asking anyone, he left the whole crowd waiting while he prayed. When the disciples anxiously said, “Everyone is looking for you,” Jesus replied, “Let’s go somewhere else.” He was able to take the long view of God’s plans, and of his own place in them.

- Imagine for a moment how a Hollywood publicist would have told Jesus to “capitalize” on the crowds he drew in Capernaum. (He was, after all, the Lord of the universe come to live on earth.) In what ways did Jesus behavior differ from the advice you imagine him getting? In what ways can you learn from Jesus’ example, and adopt his attitudes toward “success” and letting God define your true value?

**Family Activity:** Every part of the Body of Christ is needed; each has its role to play. Assess how this truth is demonstrated in your own family. Are everyone’s gifts and abilities valued? Does each person contribute to the functioning of the home as he or she is able? Ask someone in your family to draw an outline of a body. Brainstorm how each person can serve in the family as one or more of these parts: head, hand, heart, feet, mouth, ears, and eyes. Write these ideas on or near the body part on the picture, using a different color for each person. What is each person able to add to the family? Celebrate each person’s gifts. Emphasize that each person is highly valued and equally loved by God.