

The Rev. Dr. Cornel Barnett
 Redwoods Presbyterian Church
 Larkspur, California
 Genesis 1:1-3, Isaiah 42:5-9,
 John 1:1-5, John 11:17-26a
 God Says, "Yes."

God "speaks" throughout the Bible. We see God speaking creation into being in the Genesis story and the phrase, "Thus says the Lord," is a constant refrain in the Book of Isaiah and other prophets.

The Gospel according to John begins with the importance of "word" as an identifier for God and Jesus. According to the narrators of the New Testament Jesus speaks God's word as though he were God.

The United Church of Christ, one of the mainline denominations in the US today has as its motto: "God is still speaking," which ends in a comma. They say: "Do not cling to where Luther and Calvin have brought you, for God hath yet more truth and light to break forth from his holy word."

Our church has its denominational roots in Calvin *and* we affirm that we are reformed and always reforming according to the word of God and the call of the spirit.

The comma in the UCC phrase invites us to believe that God speaks today through other people, nature, music, art, a theorem, the Bible, and in so many other ways.

In essence God speaks through the wisdom each of us contains within ourselves. It is wisdom that calls us to "live fully, love wastefully, and to dare to be all that each of us has the capacity to be," according to former Episcopal bishop and Harvard professor John Shelby Spong.

Today, I have chosen a song with my commentary to hear God's word. It's called "God Said No" by Dan Bern. His birth name is Bernstein.

The first verse is this:

"I met God on the edge of town
 Where the wind meets the stillness
 Where the darkness meets the light
 Where the ocean meets the sky
 Where the desert meets the rain
 Where the earth meets the heavens
 On the edge of town I met God"

So far, this sounds like the creation account of Genesis. It's beautifully stated.

Bern continues:

"I asked God
Do one thing for me
Send me back in time
Send me to Seattle
Let me go
Find Kurt Cobain
Take away his gun
Take away his bullets
Talk to him
Make him wanna live
Tell him how we love him
Help him see his glory
God Said No
If I sent you back
If you really found him
You would only ask him
If he could
Help you get a deal
If he knows a lawyer
If he can help you
God Said No."

Kurt Cobain was the lead singer, guitarist and primary songwriter of the grunge band Nirvana who committed suicide. God tells Bern you can't go back and if you did your agenda would be self-centered.

Bern continues:

"I asked God
Do one thing for me
Send me back in time
Send me to Berlin
Let me find
The one they call Hitler
I will stalk him
I will bring him down
I will bring along
A powerful gun
Loaded with bullets
Obliterate his memory
God Said No
If I sent you back
You would get caught up
In theory and discussion
You would let your fears
Delay and distract you
You would make friends

You would take a lover
 God Said No.”

Bern plugs into an existential desire to seek revenge against ruthless dictators. Here again God tells Bern that he would be distracted by fears and everyday relationships. Can we go back? Bern continues:

“I asked God
 Do one thing for me
 Send me back in time
 Send me to Jerusalem
 Let me go
 Let me go find Jesus
 Let me save his life
 As they try to kill him
 Let me take him down
 Down from the cross
 Take the iron from his body
 Try to heal his wounds
 God Said No
 If I let you go
 If you really found him
 Walking with the cross
 You would stare
 Your tongue no longer working
 Eyes no longer seeing
 Ears no longer hearing
 God said Time
 Time belongs to me
 Time's my secret weapon
 My final advantage
 God turned away
 From the edge of town
 I knew I was beaten
 And that now was all I had
 God Said No.”

Here again, Bern is Monday morning quarterbacking. There's a lot we can do after-the-fact. God knows and tells so to Bern and he hears it just like that. “God said no.”

However, the second-to-last line of Dan Bern's song has a clue to God's “yes” which is encouraging for me because I like to hear God's “yes” although I admit that God's “no” in Bern's song is a kind of “yes.” Bern sings: “And that *now* was all I had.” In the end, God expects us to live, love and be in the now. “God is still speaking,” is an affirmation of that.

When Jesus says, “I am the resurrection and the life” he draws God's word into his present day and calls us to affirm that same resurrection and life in our day. The story of the raising of

Lazarus from the dead is a symbol of God's power over death and affirmation of life. It's a complicated and yet compelling story.

God tells us today to go alongside friends like Kurt Cobain or family contemplating suicide. God says speak out against and stop the oppressors and dictators like Hitler of our day (and to do so non-violently, if possible) and God encourages us to be advocates and life-givers for those who suffer like Jesus and most of all to affirm resurrection and life.

God says, "Yes." God's "yes" is wisdom that calls us to live fully, love wastefully, and to dare to be all that each of us has the capacity to be. Amen.