



Sermon

When I've had a really long day and my mind is so full I feel like I'm going crazy, sometimes I chill out by watching reality tv – you know the kind where a whole bunch of stereotypically beautiful people do crazy stuff to compete for the affection of another stereotypically beautiful person. Right now, for instance, my show of choice is a Double Shot of Love on MTV. Every week two people get sent home, and supposedly, the last ones left walk off into the sunset having found true love.

Now let me be clear here, and I know this is going to sound contradictory but hear me out – I am completely offended by the moral values reflected on reality tv! It takes advantage of people's hopes and dreams. It artificially creates drama. It's based on competition rather than cooperation. And, these shows do nothing to model healthy relationships. So, why do I watch them then? Well, partly, because I enjoy yelling back at the screen! In most of my life I try to choose my words very carefully because I think it's the right thing to do, but sometimes you just end up holding so much in, all the irrational things and judgmental things that you know should never see the light of day. This is one place where I let go, and say whatever I'm thinking without that internal censor telling me, "No, Krista, what you're thinking is not appropriate to say." I think we all need those places.

But, the bigger part of what draws me is that these reality shows revolve around one person who is required to say no. Every week, someone has to be sent home. They have to look into someone's eyes and say I do not choose you, and this is why.

How rarely are the nos in our lives that clear? Tony Blair, who is quoted in the order of service, was absolutely right. It is much easier to say yes than it is to say no, and I think there's all kinds of reasons for that. We want to be liked. Most of us don't like confrontation. We don't want to let people down. We want to be respected. But how ironic it is that the person who is often most respected and has the most self-respect is one who has mastered the art of saying no, of denying a request in a way that often leaves someone feeling validated and respected even when they don't get what they want. It's a delicate art that many of us, myself included, could learn to do a lot better.

It seems to me that in these reality tv shows everyone tries to act honorably in the presence of rejection, whether they're the one doing the rejecting, or the one being rejected. And everyone struggles with this because I don't know that we're given really good tools to say no in healthy ways, or to accept someone else's no in a healthy way. It's something we have to learn, often painfully and with a lot of mistakes. And I think it's that struggle that I appreciate being able to watch. Some people do really good with rejection. Others completely lose it. Some are really good at doing the rejecting, they know just how to say it so that the other person can hold onto their dignity and leave. Others aren't. Sometimes in their fear they become mean or defensive or the words aren't right.

It's really that person's journey that interests me the most, because I had to learn the hard way how to say no. As a young woman in my 20s I had pretty bad boundaries. I don't know that a lot of women learn how to say no very well. So much of our conditioning is about taking care of people, that we have to really find it in ourselves to learn how to say no in a healthy way. And so I'll find myself watching very carefully the person who has to send someone home. As the hour draws to a close, all the stupid games and shallow encounters end. The one making the decision secludes themselves, with the requisite number of cameras of course, to talk through their decision. They'll comment on how they experienced this person, or what happened in an encounter with that person. Is this person trustworthy? Was that person respectful to me and the others? Does this person look like someone who can compromise? Do they play fair?

What becomes clear is that the no they have to say is going to involve their identity, meaning how they understand themselves and how they see themselves in the world. Just like with all the nos you shared with us this morning, it's going to involve your moral values. It's going to involve your sense of self worth and how you value other people. And isn't that what our nos and yeses are all about. They are about our identity, our sense of self worth,



our worth of the people in our lives. They involve our moral values. Every no and every yes either help or hinder us in living with integrity.

As all of you are probably aware, we are entering an incredibly significant week. Three important markers are approaching us.

Tomorrow is Martin Luther King Day when we celebrate Martin Luther King's legacy. This nation is so radically changed because of his vision and his ability to bring thousands with him on the journey. We celebrate to remember what he accomplished and to stir in us a renewed commitment to bring justice and equality.

On Tuesday, we will inaugurate our first black president. What an amazing thing that this happens the day after Martin Luther King day. Not that Barack Obama's inauguration is going to erase the stain of racism from this country, no that the importance of his presidency should be based primarily on his color. We are more than our race. But there is no denying that the inauguration of an African American president is a huge marker for this country.

On Thursday some Americans are going to celebrate the anniversary of Roe V. Wade, the 1973 Supreme Court Decision that put into law a woman's right to privacy regarding her reproductive choices. Roe v. Wade made abortion legal in this country.

Each of these significant events is about identity. They are about moral values. They are about saying no in some pretty life affirming ways. Martin Luther King was saying no to injustice. No to being a second-class citizen. No to the divisions that separate us from each other.

Barack Obama's victory in November was about saying no to eight years of the previous administration. His campaign was about saying no to partisanship, no to fear-based politics, no to political leaders putting themselves above the law, no to de-regulation, the list could go on. And no doubt, as he assumes the mantle of power in these uncertain times, he's going to have to keep saying no. Saying yes to this country is going to be about saying no to many of the things that have brought us to this place in time. It will truly be a test of this nation to see if we can handle the nos, and keep the bigger picture in mind as we move forward.

Roe v. Wade was about saying no to a world view that says other people get to make decisions about your body. It was about creating a sacred space around each woman and her family so that they can make the right decisions for themselves without outside interference. That decision is between you, your doctor, and your god.

All of these no's are important because what they're really doing is saying yes to life. Why did you choose to share your particular no this morning? You were saying yes to your life and what's best for you. Yes to values that uphold life. Yes to aspirations and hopes about what our world should and could be like. Your no made you into a ready vessel for the moving of the holy in your life.

What do you need to say no to right now, so that you can say yes to the holy in your life? What doors do you need to close so that others can open? I think that's the really hard part about saying no. Because it does mean letting go of something, sometimes before you know that something else is going to be there for you to hold on to.

So if you want to do this, if you want to make good healthy nos a part of your life, how do you do that? Well, I have a few insights to share with you, insights that have been hard won, through many mistakes and I share them with you. Take what you need, and leave the rest.

A good no helps you live authentically, meaning that you're really being the person you are. You aren't pretending for anyone, or being someone you aren't to please other people.

A good no is about being in better relationship with the important people in your life. When you're being who you really are, you get to love them better, and they get to love you better.



A good no helps you to find joy in your life. You've said no to the unimportant things and yes to the important things, so you're giving your heart to the things that matter.

A good no is one that is not based on pride. Saying no to hurt someone is not a good no. Saying no simply to put someone off is not a good no. Saying no to get out of a responsibility that is yours is not a good no. A good no is not only about respecting yourself. It is about respecting others.

Having said that, a good no is not dependent on how the person you are saying no to responds to you. You can say it perfectly, have really good healthy reasons for saying no, but some people simply will not be able to handle your boundaries, and they may push back. This is why it is really important to be clear in yourself about why you've decided to say no. Be sure that you're doing it for the right reasons, and you won't be so tempted to give in. This can be hard to do if you really want that person's approval or if you have a hard time standing up for yourself. It's easy to feel that you're the one hurting the person when they react badly to you saying no. But if your intentions are true, and if you are coming from a good and right place inside you, you aren't the one hurting them. They are hurting themselves with their bad reaction.

And finally, a good no also happens when you realize that you don't know everything. The circumstances of your life could change. You could find out new information that changes how you feel about things. Sometimes it's o.k. to change your no to a yes. We all make mistakes and we all deserve the chance to correct them and to try and make things right.

So sometime in the coming week, I'll probably find myself watching *A Double Shot At Love*, yelling at the screen, waiting to see how everyone deals with the no that has to happen. But if we want rich spirit filled lives, if we want to live with integrity and make good choices, if we want to be ready vessels for the moving of the holy, we have to say no sometimes and we have to give other people the room to say no to us. Sometimes it's the best way to say yes to all those things that really matter.

Amen and blessed be.