



Therefore, Be It Resolved – Touchpoint for January 5, 2022

Luke 3:15-18, 21-22 Good News Translation

People's hopes began to rise, and they began to wonder whether John perhaps might be the Messiah. So John said to all of them, "I baptize you with water, but someone is coming who is much greater than I am. I am not good enough even to untie his sandals.

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. He has his winnowing shovel with him, to thresh out all the grain and gather the wheat into his barn; but he will burn the chaff in a fire that never goes out." In many different ways John preached the Good News to the people and urged them to change their ways.

After all the people had been baptized, Jesus also was baptized. While he was praying, heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit came down upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my own dear Son. I am pleased with you."

Grace and peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

"You are my own dear Son. I am pleased with you."

Well, let's see. It's January 5th, 5 days into the New Year. How are you all doing with your resolutions? I made a bunch of resolutions, especially around diet, nutrition and exercise. I made it to halftime of the Rose Bowl. Then, for some reason, a Pizza Hut Triple Treat Box showed up on my doorstep. Bye-bye resolutions.

We've all made resolutions at one time or another, specifically, at this time of year. My friend Henry has the best one. He makes one resolution every January 1st. The same one every year for the last 5 years and he says he has never broken it. And what is it?

He resolves not to make any resolutions!!! I suppose that's one way to deal with the resolutions.

Now, what if I told you that today's passage is about a resolution? What if I told you that this second Sunday of the New Year speaks to us about resolutions? After all, wasn't that John the Baptist's message? Everyone should resolve to change their ways. Repent, resolve... to be different!!! Why, if we could only resolve to be the people that John the Baptist calls us to be!

But that is not the resolution I want to talk about today. I don't want to talk about our resolutions, but GOD'S RESOLUTION! In today's passage, God makes a resolution, to Jesus:

"You are my own dear Son. I am pleased with you."

Have you ever thought of it that way? Have you ever thought that God has made a resolution towards us? God has resolved to be our God. And God has resolved that we will be God's people, God's beloved sons and daughters. Now I know what some of you are thinking. "The Father didn't say this to all of us, just to Jesus." But, here's the thing. I don't think these words are just meant for Jesus. I think they're meant for all of us.

We've minimized the incarnation.

We say Jesus is fully human and fully divine, whatever that means. But we've only embraced half of it. The part where God becomes human. And by that I mean, when we look at Jesus, we only see him on the God

side of the God/Human dynamic.

When we see how Jesus lives and what he says, we say that represents God. And that is true. And so, when we hear the Father say to Jesus, “You are my beloved Son” we think this is the Father speaking only to Jesus’ Divine nature.

But there is a whole lot more to it. God is also speaking to Jesus’ human nature. Jesus just doesn’t represent God to us. Jesus represents us to God. He is fully human. And that means he is the ‘Stand-In’ for us in God’s relationship to us. He is our representative, our Archetype. What God says to Jesus, God says to us. What God promises to Jesus, God promises to us. Where God brings Jesus to — new life and resurrection — God will also bring to us.

James Nestingen and Gerhard Forde put it well in their book, “Free to Be”, when they write about the first words of the 10 commandments, “I am the Lord your God.” They write:

God has made a decision (resolution) for you. God hasn’t waited to find out how sincere you are, how devout or religious you might be, or how well you understand the Bible and the Catechism. God hasn’t even waited to find out if you are interested or willing to take this decision (resolution) seriously. God has simply decided (resolved).

God made this decision (resolution) knowing full well the kind of person you are. God knows you better than anyone else could—inside out, upside down, and backwards. God knows where you are strong and where you are weak, what you are most proud of and what you would most like to hide. Be that as it may, God’s decision (resolution) is made.

God comes right out and says it: “I am the Lord your God.” This is the decision (resolution) God has made. God has decided (resolved) to be your God. For God wants to be as close to you as your next breath, to be the one who gives you confidence and value, to open a future to you in the freedom of the Word. God wants to be the one to whom you turn for whatever you need.

God has said this many times before, many times. God first announced this decision (resolution) about you when you were baptized, “You,” God said, as the pastor spoke your name, “are baptized in my name. I am your God and I will never let you go.”

They then go on to talk about how God has said it since your Baptism too, speaking on the lips of those who have loved you, whether they were a part of your family, a teacher, or anyone else who welcomed you and let you know, “You belong!”

And in fact, God is saying it to you right now. You who are hearing this and you who are reading this, God is saying to you right now, “I am your God.” And as my dad used to say, “Put that in your pipe and smoke it!”

Make no mistake about it. This is a reversal from how God is often portrayed, talked about, pictured. We always think we have to do something first. We have to act first, and then, God as judge, will decide after we are all done whether to accept us or not.

But this baptism story, and where it is placed in Luke’s gospel is a reminder that we have it all backwards. It’s only chapter 3 and Jesus has done nothing at this point in the gospel of Luke to warrant God’s love and delight.

And yet, here are the words. Here is the resolution:

“You are my own dear Son. I am pleased with you.”

So, God accepts us, calls us ‘sons and daughters’ and is ‘pleased with us’ before we do anything.

Make no mistake about it. This is a reversal from how God is often portrayed, talked about, pictured. My friend Henry likes to express it this way. He likes to say that most often Christianity has been presented as, “Behave, Believe, Belong.” In other words, once you Behave properly and once you have proper Belief, then you can Belong. Then God will let you come in.

“Behave, Believe, Belong.”

But as Henry says, “That is not the way God works. God works from a “Belong, Believe, Behave” model. First and foremost, YOU BELONG!!! And everything flows from this. All belief and behavior comes out of the experience of knowing one belongs, one is loved and accepted, and claimed as a child of God — unconditionally — before anything else.

Belong. Believe. Behave.

Now if you get this concept, if you see what I am trying to say here, then you might have an insight into why some faith communities baptize infants. Look, I’m not interested in arguing about infant baptism. I got kicked out of a Young Life group over this issue 50 years ago, so I’m not interested in arguing, but I am interested in sharing the perspective with you.

I have had people tell me my baptism is invalid because I was only 3 weeks old when it happened. When I ask them why that invalidates it they say, “Because you didn’t understand what was happening. You didn’t accept it.”

And my response is, “**Exactly!!!!**” That usually leads to a prolonged period of silence on their part and so I continue.

“Exactly. God accepted me and claimed me and called me ‘son’ before I knew what was happening, before I did anything, thought anything, decided anything.

I think that’s called grace.

And in that respect, God is like my parents. After I was born, they brought me home from the hospital, gave me food and shelter, made me a part of the family, before I knew or understood who they were or what food and shelter was.

Would you rather they had left me at the hospital until I reached some “age of accountability” and decided to accept them as ‘my personal mother and father’ before they brought me home? ... I think not!

For those faith communities that practice infant baptism, in baptism God is the subject, God’s activity is the verb, and we are the object.

“You are my own dear child. I am pleased with you.”

You are Mystery’s beloved child, before you do anything.

Look, the first words of the 10 commandments, Luke’s narrative of Jesus’ baptism, ‘Belong, Believe, Behave,’ Infant baptism. It’s all saying the same thing. In the beginning — in our beginning — there is God, there is the Mystery, and we are declared ‘Good’, ‘Dear’, ‘Pleasing’ before we do or understand anything.

Therefore, Be It Resolved: **You are God’s own dear child. God is pleased with you.**

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taize Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God

Calm Me Lord

(Margaret Rizza)

Calm me Lord as you calmed the storm.
Still me Lord, keep me from harm.
Let all the tumult within me cease.
Enfold me Lord, in your peace.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Dwell Among Us

(Salt of the Sound)

Keep moving and living and breathing in us
Keeping working and singing and speaking through us
You dwell among us...
With all this life I long to see, more of You and less of me
Lord send Your spirit here to work in us

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer

(The Scottish Festival Singers)

Benediction

My Peace

(Keith Duke)

Peace to know, Peace to live,
Peace to show, and a peace to give.
It's a peace to share and a peace that cares.
My peace I give unto you. My peace.

