



TOUCH POINT

New Year's Resolutions – Touchpoint for January 4, 2023

Matthew 3:13-17 (NRSVUE) ¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” ¹⁵ But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented.

¹⁶ And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw God's Spirit descending like a dove and alighting on him. ¹⁷ And a voice from the heavens said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

Grace and peace from the Resolutions in which we live and move and have our being.

“This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased.”

Well, how are you all doing with your resolutions? How's it going for you?

Most of my resolutions lasted 'til about halftime of the first football game on January 1st (or whenever it was that the delivery person showed up with my order of pizza, chicken wings, and cheesy bread).

So how's it going for you? How are your resolutions going?

That's a big part of this time of year, isn't it? New Year's resolutions. Sign up for that gym membership. Buy all that healthy food. Begin a new prayer practice or book reading list.

That's a big part of this time of year, isn't it? Time for us to make resolutions. It makes us feel so in control, in charge ... and this is the year we are finally going to get it right!

It's such a big part of this time of year.

MAKING RESOLUTIONS

And so I want to take some time to talk about resolutions, and the vows and commitments made at this point in the calendar year.

Only, I don't want to talk about the resolutions we make – I want to talk about the resolutions God makes.

Have you ever thought about that? Have you ever thought about the resolutions God has made? Resolutions made to you and the entire world?

In our gospel passage for today, we get a glimpse of God's first resolution to us in the story of Jesus' baptism:

“You are my beloved child, in whom I am well pleased.”

These are the first words God speaks to Jesus. This is God's resolution, God's commitment to Jesus. These are the words Jesus hears at the beginning of his ministry.

At the beginning... not just in the middle, not just at the end.

At the beginning... before Jesus has done anything other than being a terrible two, a precocious teenager, and a twenty-something male.

At the beginning.

And I know some will say that God is only speaking to Jesus in this passage and it doesn't apply to us, but I think it does. Because this passage calls to mind some other beginnings where God issues resolutions of grace and acceptance.

In the creation story, after each day of creating, God looks and sees that *"It is good."* And after the last day of creating, when we were created, God says that *"It is very good."*

And that's probably a good thing that God said it right then, because if God had waited a few more days, who knows what he might have said.

Or think about Mary, when the angel first greets her, it's with these words from God: *"Hail Mary, full of grace."*

Or these words from Jeremiah: *"I will be your God, and you will be my people."*

God, it seems, likes to make resolutions about us before waiting to see how things will work out.

Now, that's not how we normally think of God. We usually think of God as a judge, who makes a judgment at the end of our lives, at the end of time.

We usually think of God as a judge who sits back and waits to issue a pronouncement on you and me, after it is all over.

After it's all over, God will decide whether to be our God or not. God will decide whether or not we are beloved children.

But that is not the God of this passage. That is not the God of the creation story or exile. That is not the God who comes to Mary.

"Beloved child... well pleased." "Very good." "Hail Mary, full of grace." "I will be your God and you will be my people."

These are the first words God speaks over us and our lives. And they bring us to life even as they cause us death.

You see, once you've heard those words spoken over you: *"Beloved child..., very good..., full of grace" ...*

Once you've heard those words: *"I will be your God and you will be my people" ...*

Once you've heard those words, it is too late for promises to 'do better.' Too late for 'getting myself together,' too late for guilt to be of any use.

Once you've heard those words, death has come to your striving to be right, and your goal to be judged worthy.

“Beloved child... well pleased.” “Very good.” “Hail Mary, full of grace.”

“I will be your God and you will be my people.”

These are the resolutions God has made to us. From the beginning of time. From the beginning of us.

**God will be our God.
And we will be God’s beloved children.**

And to paraphrase St. Paul, “Nothing can separate us from God’s resolve to be our loving God. Nothing can separate us from being God’s beloved children.”

From the beginning. Before we say or do anything.

Again, these are the first words spoken to Jesus, or over Jesus in Matthew's gospel. The first words. I think that's significant, don't you? The first words...

What are the first words you think of when you think of God? What was the first message you received from the church about God? Was it, “*You are my beloved child, in whom I am well pleased*”? Or was it something else?

I went online to look at the steps to salvation, or how to be born again. And I must say, I didn't hear many first words that had God saying to me, “*You are my beloved child, with whom I am well pleased.*”

I read a lot about me being a sinner. That seemed to be the starting point for everything. My sinfulness. I read a lot about the ‘sinner's prayer,’ but I couldn't find the ‘beloved child of God’ prayer.

Wikipedia didn't have that listed!?! That's more than a little curious, isn't it?

Why is that? Why is there a ‘sinner’s prayer’ but not a ‘beloved child of God’ prayer?

You see, the ‘sinner’s prayer’ feeds into our narcissistic spiritual ego’s need to be in control. It feeds into our desire to make a personal resolution to accept and obey God. It feeds into our desire to make it about us, and what we need to do.

But the gospel story, the Jesus story, the God story, speaks to the resolutions God has made to us, what resolutions God has committed to do, and who God has made a resolution to be.

**God will be our God.
And we will be God’s beloved children.**

And so, let me ask you a question: Whose resolutions do you think it would be most wise to focus on this new year? Whose resolutions do you think will withstand the test of time in 2023 and beyond?

In the night in which Jesus was betrayed, denied, and run away from, Peter made these resolutions to Jesus before the meal: *“Even if everyone else will stumble and fall tonight, I will not. I’ll be beside You. I won’t falter.”*

And this one as well: *“I won’t deny You. Even if that means I have to die with You!”*

And Jesus simply replied: *“Cock-a-doodle-do, Peter. Cock-a-doodle-do.”*

And also:

*“Take and eat. Take and drink.
This is me.
This is my resolution to be with you through it all.”*

So make all the resolutions you want this new year. Make them big and make them bold. Declare them to the world and God if you want.

And when, at some point in this new year, you hear the rooster crow on your resolutions... then, then... RE-MEMBER yourself to the resolutions God has made to you and about you:

*“I am your God and you are my beloved child.”
“Take and eat. Take and drink.
This is my resolution to be with you through it all.”*

RE-MEMBER yourself to the resolutions God has made to you and about you.

Because, to once again paraphrase St. Paul and specifically Romans 11:29:

**“The resolutions of God are
IRREVOCABLE.”**

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

Sevenfold Amen

(The Emmanuel Quartet)

Amen.