

Yearly reminder:  
there is no  
resolution that, if  
kept, will make you  
more worthy of love.

You, as your actual  
self and not as some  
made up ideal, are  
already worthy.

-Nadia Bolz-Weber

Tonight, as so much of the world will be looking up to countdown clocks and Times Square balls and the brightest of fireworks filling up the sky, perhaps we in the church should find a way to lift something else up just as high for all humanity to be amazed by, not just for midnight and beyond this evening, but for the early days of 2024 and throughout the year for that matter. Because, while the time draws near to 12AM, many children of God will be putting the finishing touches on their personal resolutions for the next 365 days or so. Some of them will be for better exercise or improved eating habits or consistent prayer or diving into Scripture more frequently, just to name a few. And many will succeed all the way through next December. Others will struggle and not manage to pull it off by January 2. Nevertheless, the church, God, has something holy to say for such carefully crafted plans of ours.

It is the very Gospel not just for January 1, but all our days. It goes something like this: “There is no resolution that, if kept, will make you more worthy of love. You, as your actual self and not as some made up ideal, are already worthy of love.” So, if you make a commitment to read so many chapters of the Bible each day, or spend so many hours serving your local community, or insist on exercising however many times per week; even if you pull all of that off for the entire upcoming year, God is not going to love you any more than God already does, because, it is simply not possible for God to cherish you any more than God already has from the very beginning.

Granted, that isn't to say we cannot set some goals to do our part to raise our spiritual awareness of God in our life, or that we cannot make a greater impact on our neighbors to improve the circumstances of those around us, or that the better choices made regarding our health will not only shape our life for the better, but for those who care about us, too. All of that can be true, but it still does not alter the Gospel: you are going to be loved just the same in 2024 as you were in 2023 or any year throughout your life. You cannot do a thing to change that Great News of God's constant adoration of you.

Now, those respective words of that most blessed assurance are from one of the most famous Lutherans of our denomination of the ELCA, The Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber. The reasons for her fame are many, as she is not the standard run-of-the-German-heritage-mill Lutheran clergy. For starters, she has many tattoos that she is not afraid to show even while preaching. She has also been to her fair share of AA meetings, as she is a recovering alcoholic and drug addict, and is now over thirty years sober. She grew up in a fundamentalist Christian home, which led her to leave the church entirely for more than a decade, engaging a lifestyle that would thoroughly embarrass plenty of the run-of-the-German-heritage-mill Lutherans. Except, if you want to reach the people who are often overlooked by the church, sometimes you need a most precious child of God who is more than willing to make a career resolution to preach the incredibly extreme grace of Jesus Christ.

So, many years ago, Pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber started an ELCA congregation in Colorado, ministering to hundreds of people who were not baptized for a variety of reasons. The community of faith was called House for All Sinners and Saints, and the name of that very church would carry over to the hospitality of holy Communion. All, and they meant all sinners

and saints, were welcomed to God's grace-filled table. And the best example of that is a story that Pastor Nadia recently shared herself:

*House for All Sinners & Saints was only about a year old when I took a Sunday morning phone call from a young parishioner who had gone home to Grand Rapids for a weekend visit. I could tell right away that [Rhonda] was crying... When she finally spoke, it was halting and in a whisper. "Nadia, I'm at my parent's church and they're serving communion and... I'm not allowed to take it..."*

*She had spent a year with [our church], a community centered around the grace of an unapologetically open table, and without even noticing it had happened, she had been changed by it. Every Sunday she had seen a woman stand at the altar table... and say these words: "We have an open table at House, which means that during communion, everyone without exception is invited to come forward at communion and receive the bread and wine – which for us is the body and blood of Christ..."*

*Some would argue it is reckless to just feed all who hunger. That the Eucharist is too sacred to just hand it over to anyone. But maybe the Eucharist is too sacred to not just hand it over to anyone...*

*Before hanging up with [Rhonda], I assured her she was loved and wanted in our community and then I said, "Would it be ok if I told some folks at church tonight about what happened?" and she said yes.*

*As a small group of us stayed behind that night to stack chairs and put away paraments, I told them about [Rhonda's] devastation at having been denied communion at home. Without skipping a beat, [one of the members] said, "Well then we'll just have to take her communion at the airport."*

*So, at 10[pm] on a Wednesday, eight of us showed up to Denver International Airport with a cardboard chauffer's sign that said "[Rhonda Parker]" on one side, and "Child of God" on the other, and waited for her at the bottom of the escalator. We then made our way up to the interfaith prayer room. I spoke about how on the night Jesus was betrayed he gathered with his faltering friends for a meal that tasted of freedom, and then we handed her what had been withheld days before: the body and blood of Christ.*

*If we are to be judged for having gotten this wrong, let it be that we sat more at the table than fewer. Because it [is] not our table. It [is] God's.*

So, yes, as much as we as the church would like to lift something up so high tonight for all the world to notice just how much grace and mercy and compassion that God and hopefully, God's church as well, has to offer; it so happens that that ultimate proclamation of that Gospel happens at a table on the ground level, on the surface where we achieve some personal resolution victories, but where we also have our fair share of setbacks and disappointments. And this year, as always, no matter what, you will always have a seat at this table. No matter the mistakes made, whether known or not by anyone else, you will always have a seat at this table. And for your family and friends, who may have had their fair share of setbacks and disappointments with organized religion anything as Pastor Nadia did herself, we will always make room for them, too. That is our resolution yet again this year: that no matter how well anyone does with their own goals or plans for life, they can always be made whole by God's boundless grace in Jesus Christ right here every time. For that Gospel not just for January 1, but for all the days of our life, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!