

God Says Yes in Baptism
First in a Series of Three (God Says Yes)
January 12, 2020
Rev. Dr. Larry Griffin | Page 1 of 4

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment, heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love, with him I am well pleased. Matthew 3:16-17

Romans 6:3 - Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life....In the same way count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Dear Friends in Christ,

It seems as though there are two kinds of people, those who believe in making New Year's resolutions and those who don't. Those who are interested in making changes and those who for whatever reason are ok with going the same direction. This morning, as we dive into this New Year with all of its ups and downs sure to come, I invite you to be part of a congregational resolution to be all that God is calling us to be, to be like a city of lights set on a hill to which hurting and broken people are attracted, or to use the language of our Gospel lesson for today, to be living our lives in such a way that our Father in heaven looks down on us and says to anyone who cares to listen, “those are my sons and daughters down there in Waseca, MN, I love them, and with them I am well pleased.

A few weeks ago, Debi and I decided to give a portion of our unfinished basement a new look, as in sheetrocking, taping, mudding, sanding, and painting. Which made it necessary for us to take down what was hanging on those basement walls, including the poster boards from our youngest son's high school graduation open house. Now understand that Noah graduated in 2008, and here we are, 11 and a half years later, taking our basement in a new direction. Which brought back memories of all four of our kids choosing their directions in life after high school or college graduations:

- Noah flying south to Florida the day after high school graduation chasing a dream of teaching tennis at a country club alongside of his older brother.
- Michelle, four years earlier, moving two hours east after college graduation with her husband the dairy farmer chasing a dream of teaching and raising children up in the Lord.
- Nate, four years earlier, packing his belongings in a rusted out grand am, driving south to Florida after college chasing his dream of fame and fortune in the world of tennis.
- Our daughter Heather, a year before that, packing up a few belongings and going east to Michigan to chase her dream of teaching children in Lutheran schools to know Jesus as their Savior.

God Says Yes in Baptism
First in a Series of Three (God Says Yes)
January 12, 2020
Rev. Dr. Larry Griffin | Page 2 of 4

In each case, Debi and I loved these kids more than words could say, we were pleased with their accomplishments up to that point, and we said yes to the new directions they were choosing.

So also in the case of Jesus as he submits to the baptism of a mere mortal and declares his dream of fulfilling all righteousness, His Father announces to all who would pay attention, “this is my Son, I love Him more than words could say, I am pleased with all that He has done and will be doing, I say yes to the ministry he is now beginning.

Our sermon series has the theme, “And God Says Yes,” which is the title of a song we’ll be singing during the offering the next three weeks. Two parts to our sermon today: **1) God said yes to us in the Baptism of Jesus, and 2) God says yes to us in the waters of our Baptism.**

Epiphany truth #1 is that God said yes to us in the waters of the River Jordan at Baptism of Jesus. In Old Testament times, according to Moses in Numbers chapter 8, when Levite men reached the age of 25, they would be set apart for the priesthood by a ceremony that included a sprinkling of water, it included shaving their bodies, washing their clothes, sacrificing one or more bulls, and having Aaron and his sons lay hands on them. And so the priests would be consecrated, they would be set apart from all other Israelites as they began their ministry, Aaron and his sons would say “yes, these men are qualified, they are purified, they are ready to serve, let’s get this done.

So also in the case of Jesus, the great high priest who would at just the right time offer up once and for all the sacrifice to end all Old Testament sacrifices. Here at the River Jordan, the Spirit of God descends on him in the body of a dove, and the voice of the Father booms out to sinners in every generation who care to listen, “Yes, this is the Messiah you’ve all been waiting for, He’s qualified, He’s been anointed, He’s ready to serve, let’s get this done.

In the Christmas story, we saw with our own eyes and heard with our own ears God saying yes to us as Jesus is formed in the womb of his virgin mother Mary, God said yes to us at just the right time in the stench of a Bethlehem manger, as God Himself takes on human flesh. In a few weeks, as Epiphany gives way to Lent and Easter, we will be exploring God saying yes to us in the suffering, in the death, and in the resurrection of his beloved Son Jesus Christ. But today, as we begin the Epiphany season, we explore Jesus saying yes to us in the waters of the River Jordan.

Not only was Jesus sent by his Father into this world to suffer and die, He came willingly. Not only was Jesus carrying out an assignment given, he did so on a volunteer basis. When he submitted to John’s Baptism, he was fulfilling what John the Baptist had been predicting - the kingdom of God had arrived, the days of permitting the old sinful nature to be ruling were numbered, and repentance was required.

God Says Yes in Baptism
First in a Series of Three (God Says Yes)
January 12, 2020
Rev. Dr. Larry Griffin | Page 3 of 4

By accepting baptism in the river Jordan from John, Jesus was declaring His intention to do His Father's will. In the near future He would be going out into the wilderness, He would be tempted in every way we are tempted, yet without sin. He would be preaching like no one had ever quite preached before, the blind would be seeing, the deaf would be hearing, and the paralyzed would be walking. He and His Father would be one. He would be saying to His Father, "yes, I will suffer all that I am appointed to suffer, yes, I will drink the cup of your wrath down to the last drop, yes, I will die the death I have been appointed to die, yes, I will not rest until your will is done here on earth, as it has been decreed in heaven.

To which His Father replies, "This is my Son whom I love. In Him I am well pleased. You will do well to listen to Him."

Epiphany truth #2 is that God says yes to us in the waters of our Baptism. At the heart of Christianity is the simple truth that God loves us, we have been baptized into his family, and all the privileges of living as the sons and daughters of our Father in heaven. And yet the reality is that sin rears its ugly head every single day, and it's a struggle to live in a way that is pleasing to God. Instead of being famous for confessing our sins, we are more likely to be famous for stumbling into ditches of stubbornness and pride and complacency.

C.S. Lewis said it this way, *We want, in fact, not so much a Father in heaven as a grandfather in heaven—a senile benevolence who, as they say, 'liked to see the young people enjoying themselves' and whose plan for the universe was simply that it might be truly said at the end of each day 'a good time was had by all.' ...I should very much like to live in a universe governed on such lines. But since it is abundantly clear that I don't, and since I have reason to believe, nevertheless that God is Love, I conclude that my conception of love needs correction.*

I can tell you from experience that the average grandpa attitude is altogether different than the attitude of father. On vacation this past week, I played the part of playmate and ice cream provider, leaving the hard work of parenting where it belongs - with the parents! And so when C.S. Lewis points out that the sinful nature wants not to much a father who will discipline in love, but a grandfather who will practice the soft kind of love,

When God says yes to us in the waters of Baptism, He invites us to enjoy all the privileges of His grace, His mercy, and His peace, to be sure. But we also ask parents and godparents to promise that they will assist the infants to spend the rest of their lives renouncing the devil and all of his ways and all of his works. The Christian life isn't a walk in the park, it's a war that needs to be waged and a marathon race that needs to be endured.

God Says Yes in Baptism
First in a Series of Three (God Says Yes)
January 12, 2020
Rev. Dr. Larry Griffin | Page 4 of 4

In the waters of Baptism, you and I have been marked with the sign of the cross both upon our forehead and upon our heart. The Triune God has claimed us to be His own and to live in the family of God with all the privileges and rights earned for us by Jesus in His suffering, death and resurrection. Privileges of the forgiveness of sins and all of the life and salvation that comes along with it. The privilege of being a sheep in the Good Shepherd's flock with all of the green pastures and still waters that come along with it. Privileges of Jesus being with us in every circumstance of life and the comfort of knowing He is following us around with goodness and mercy.

The kingdom of God is like a grandpa following a grandson around from the pool to the hot tub to the ocean making sure bad things don't happen on his watch. It's like a grandma rocking her over tired and crying grandson to sleep in her arms. It's like a father observing a teenager with a bad attitude and setting out to correct it.

It's like a medium sized church in a medium sized city rocked one more time with a tragedy that goes beyond human explanation. This church is full of folks who know that in the waters of Baptism God said yes to them, and their journey of faith had begun. They begin their days with the sign of the cross, remembering that they are the precious and redeemed children of their heavenly father. As often as they confess the bad habits into which they have fallen and the good habits they have failed to form, that often God speaks into their hearts, he declares in no uncertain terms that he loves them more than words can say, he is pleased with them because of all that Jesus has done for them. They rejoice that in the waters of the the River Jordan, their Savior stepped into public ministry for them, in the wilderness he resisted all kinds of temptation for them, in the Garden of Gethsemane, He submitted to the will of His father for them, at the cross he suffered and he was crucified until he was dead and buried for them.

The kingdom of God is like a congregation who resolves in this New Year to be all that God is calling us to be, to be like a city of lights set on a hill to which hurting and broken people are attracted, they determine to be living their lives in such a way that their Father in heaven looks down on them again and again and says to anyone who cares to listen, "those are my sons and daughters down there in Waseca, MN, I love them, and with them I am well pleased.