

**Genesis 1:1-5; Mark 1:4-11**  
**Baptism of the Lord**  
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For some people, making New Year's resolutions is an important time-honored practice, serving as an important source of motivation to get to the gym more often or work harder on Math, to spend more time with their children or start searching for a new job.

For others, the expectation of making resolutions this time of year can be just one more reason to feel inadequate or discouraged. As one of my colleagues writes,

It's that time of the year when every website, magazine, and Twitter feed is selling January 1st-dated potential. Headlines like "New Year, New You" or "Ten Ways to Lose Weight/Get Rich/Find Love/Be the Best Person Ever in 2018". And, hey, if that kind of inspiration works for you, more power to you. Go with it. May 2018 be your best year ever.

The only thing is, New Years Day, and the companion resolution-making process, has never been all that exciting to me. If anything, it's always a little depressing. I have made resolutions but, truth be told, I've never really felt all that motivated to keep them. I used to think that was a character flaw. Now I just think that maybe resolutions tied to the date of January 1st just aren't right for me.<sup>1</sup>

In the midst of this season's invitations to a "New Year, New You" comes today's gospel affirmation that we are claimed and loved by God just as we are. No doubt there are things we all want and can do to improve our health and well-being and relationships, but no New Year's resolution can change our fundamental identity as baptized and beloved children of God.

I don't know about you, but that's news I can hear any day of the year. I need to hear that when I look in the mirror and see more wrinkle lines and gray hairs. I need to hear that when I'm nursing my regrets, wishing I could take back something I said or did. I need to hear that on the days when my efforts to be a good wife or sister or pastor fail miserably.

I need, we all need, to hear that our worthiness before God does not depend on being more beautiful, more knowledgeable, more humble, more talented or anything more than we already are.

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<sup>1</sup> Emily Heath, "New Year, Old Me," *Stillspeaking Daily Devotional*, January 1, 2018 ([http://www.ucc.org/daily\\_devotional\\_new\\_year\\_old\\_me\\_1](http://www.ucc.org/daily_devotional_new_year_old_me_1)).

In the midst of so many others things that claim our attention, that is good news. Whether it is our children, our jobs, getting into college, losing a loved one, a sibling struggling with addiction, the prospect of finding a life partner or worries about the economy, a divided government, wars and rumors of wars, it is good news to hear that we are enough. We are loved. Even that we are cherished. God loves us, year in and year out.

The coming of a New Year inevitably brings the usual ads, offering to help create a new and improved you, but the identity God gave you in your baptism doesn't get any better. Long before you were born, God had already resolved to love you and, unlike us, God can always be trusted to keep resolutions.

Throughout the history of our relationship with God, God has longed for us to know and claim our identity as beloved children of God, sending prophets and others to remind us and call us back, when we forgot. When we failed to listen even to them, God reached out in person to draw us back, even coming to us, as one of us.

In today's story, the intensity of God's desire to reach us comes to a climax at Jesus' baptism, when God tears open the heavens to get to him and to us. With Jesus, we hear the affirmation that we are God's child, the beloved in whom God is well pleased. From that point on and throughout his ministry, Jesus will reach out to those who don't know they are loved and he will touch them, heal them, feed them, and call them God's beloved.

The heavens will be torn open again in Mark's gospel and, once again, Jesus' identity as God's own will be affirmed in God's ultimate demonstration of love for us. The first time, in his baptism, only Jesus hears the voice, but on the cross at his death, it is a Roman soldier who cries out for all to hear: This is God's son.

Today, we have the opportunity to affirm the baptismal identity we share with Jesus. In the coming weeks, the Scriptures will help us explore more deeply how our identity determines the way we choose to live our lives. But for now, hear God's affirmation of you as the beloved. Hear that you are loved, even cherished and, for now, let that be enough.