

**Yearly reminder:
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resolution that, if
kept, will make you
more worthy of love.**

**You, as your actual
self and not as some
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already worthy.**

-Nadia Bolz-Weber

With each new year, I like to remind myself of the quote that is on the front cover of your bulletin this morning: “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.” Many resolutions were made when the clock struck midnight on January 1, and on this January 2, many of those resolutions have already been broken. And yet, the Gospel on *this* day is that those who have already faltered are still loved, no questions asked. The flip-side is also just as true: 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 this entire year, God is not going to love you any more than God already does, because, it is simply not possible for God to love you any more than God has thoroughly cherished you from the very beginning.

Now, that isn't to say we cannot 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 2022 as you were in 2021 or any year throughout your life. You cannot do a thing to change that Great News of God's constant adoration of you.

That is quite radical when we think about it in this world that tells us year after year that we have so much room for improvement. And although he didn't say those exact words on the bulletin cover himself, the material is certainly inspired from the ultimate source of grace and compassion in Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, the actual quote is from The Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber, who is, quite possibly, the most famous pastor in our entire denomination of the ELCA. The reasons for that 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, who is now approaching thirty years of sobriety. She grew up in a fundamentalist Christian home, and left 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, to reach the ends of the earth as proclaimed by the prophet Jeremiah this morning, sometimes you need someone who made a resolution to preach the extreme grace of Jesus Christ.

Unfortunately, at the start of my pastoral career, I made a resolution with myself not to rock the boat all that much, especially with the first congregation I served with out of seminary. Because, I thought the church as a whole was already rocked enough over those recent years that I did not want to make it worse. And one of the ways I wasn't quite so willing to go to the extreme level of grace was with Communion. It was the policy that you must be baptized in order to receive the body and blood of Christ. After all, it was the natural order of things in the church, and had been the case for God knows how many centuries. Obviously, it was perfectly fine for however long, so why bring attention to it and change that requirement? Except, this wasn't our run-of-the-German-heritage-mill church world anymore. Some children didn't get baptized, because of various family complications. The whole baptism things got pushed off to be totally forgotten altogether. And was I really going to check everyone's baptismal certificate before I dare gave them the ultimate gift of mercy and new life?

Many years ago, Pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber initiated an ELCA congregation in Colorado, ministering to plenty 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 she meant all sinners and saints, were welcomed to God's grace-filled table. And if you need an example of this absolutely radical reach of God's love in that ministry, from the very woman who proclaims our bulletin front cover quote every new year, I offer you this story of The Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber's most pivotal part in our wider church's ministry to reach the ends of the earth. She tells this story:

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 Rachel 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. People of good faith disagree on this issue...Baptism first, THEN communion. As if grace only happens in a certain order.

Before hanging up with Rachel, 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 Rachel'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 "Rachel Pater" 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, on this second day into 2022, let us not forget God's grace is just as incredibly radical today as it was in 2021, just as radical as when the Divine made a resolution to live and dwell with us imperfect humans forever as brought to reality in Bethlehem, just as radical as when Jesus dished out grace at the Last Supper to the embarrassing-behavior-ridden betraying Judas. And so, regardless of how many times you mess up this year, no matter how many times you make a commitment to better yourself and you fall drastically short, even if your belief in God is shaken to your core, you will be welcome to this table of the most radical grace imaginable, because you and everyone else, for that matter, cannot be loved any more than God already does today and will forevermore. For that Greatest News that reaches to the ends of the earth and to the ends of our very hearts, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!

Source: "On Communion: Who Gets to Receive the Goods?" The Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber (The Corners)
<https://thecorners.substack.com>