

# “Resolutions” by Doug Wysockey-Johnson

Mark 1:4-11

by Doug Wysockey-Johnson

Seekers Church

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## Resolutions

[This sermon was given from an outline. The outline is collected here.]

### NEW YEARS RESOLUTION

\* We are 8 days into the New Year, and I think it is safe to say that the resolutions are a total failure.

–I am not more organized.

–I have been to the gym one time so far.

–I have eaten much more junk food than normal.

–I am not praying more than normal, nor am I more loving.

\* In fact, my only epiphany so far this season is that I do not do well with new year resolutions.

-I assume the word resolution has something to do with the word 'resolve', as in 'I will resolve to do it'.

-And apparently, I do not have much of that.

-If it is going to be up to my strength and willpower, I will fail.

\* Pretty much the only entry in my journal this week goes like this:

*"I need help. If I am going to move from the person I am this morning to the person I want to be, I need help. If I am going to be more patient with my children; if I am going to enter into my work with good spirit and energy; If I am going to be more present to Kathryn; If I am going to allow myself to be moved by the horrific story I heard on NPR this morning; if I am going to be able to do my small part of God's kingdom work in my small corner of the world...then I will need help. I cannot do it on my own."*

## **SINFULNESS**

To put it in the language of our gospel text this morning, I felt more aware of my sinfulness this week.

-I am aware that that is a loaded word, and some people heard have religious stories where all they heard was that they were 'sinners in the hands of an angry god'.

-This is not true for me. It is not hard for me to say, 'yep, that is what I am.'

-I just feel more aware of the fact that I am not able to be the whole person I want to be by my own power.

-That is not depressing to me. It is simply true, and some days I am more aware of it than others are.

## **EPIPHANY**

\* The 12 days of Christmas have come and gone-

\* And so the season of Epiphany is upon us. Epiphany literally means 'an appearance or manifestation'. The day of epiphany commemorates the visit of the Magi, the first manifestation of Jesus to the non-Jewish gentile world, which magi represented.

\* That is the theme of this season that goes until Ash Wednesday. Traditionally, it is a time when more and more people being included in the good news of who Jesus is.

\* And who Jesus is gets expressed through stories like the one we heard this morning

## JOHN IS OUT AT THE JORDAN, INVITING PEOPLE LIKE ME TO CONFESS THEIR SINS AND BE BAPTIZED

\* Maybe there is a line of folks, waiting to get to John.

\* Jesus comes along and quietly joins the line.

—Nobody really knows who he is at this point. He might not know who he really is. In some versions of the story, John seems to recognize him, but not this one.

\* He gets in line with all of us sinners, and when it is his turn, he wades into the water. Then, he lets John baptize him.

\* Which is something the Christian church, or gospel writers seem to be a little squeamish about doing. Barbara Brown Taylor summarizes well:

*The Christian church has never been comfortable with the baptism of Jesus. Compare the accounts of it in each of the four gospels and you cannot miss the unease of the authors. Matthew elaborates on Mark's story by adding that John tried to talk Jesus out of being baptized, and Luke will not even come out and say that it was John who did it. The*

*fourth gospel is the most ticklish of all. In it, John bears witness that he saw the spirit descend like a dove upon Jesus, but he does not mention anything about a baptism at all.*

\* BBT goes on to point out that Jesus pr people could not have been pleased with this action of Jesus.

“Be a friend to sinners, kind and loving—but don’t put yourself in the position of being mistaken for one of them. Do not actually be baptized. Stand on the shore and offer words of encouragement, hand them a towel.

But don’t actually go into the water, unless, it is only to tap John on the shoulder and say, ‘take a rest John—I’ll take over for awhile”

Instead, he stands in line, and when it is his turn, he goes into the water. This is a powerful image for me: Jesus, anonymously standing in line, to receive the gift of baptism.

\*If a primary purpose of baptism is, according to John, confession of sins...and Jesus, at least according to tradition was sinless, why did he do it?

—One way to explore the question is from the Jesus fully divine, and Jesus fully human

**FROM THE JESUS FULLY DIVINE PERSPECTIVE**

\* It is consistent with who he was and is: Emmanuel, God with us, not apart and separate from us. God in line with us, God who suffers with us, God born into a stable, God who did not count equality as something to be grasped, but emptied himself; God who comes to the wedding party and throws banquets.

\* If that is who God is, then why would not God be in the river with us?

### **I AM PROBABLY MORE INTERESTED IN THE JESUS FULLY HUMAN SIDE...**

\* As a fully human person, tempted in every way, maybe he knew that if he were going to live fully into his call in the next year, he needed to hear the voice of love.

\* Like me, he needed to know that he was the beloved of God, and the degree to which he could expose himself to that voice, was the degree to which he would risk and love and be compassionate and act for justice in the world.

### **PARENT CHILD ANALOGY**

\* In preparing for this sermon, something was ringing a bell and seeming vaguely familiar. I looked it up, and sure

enough—I preached here in church [almost a year ago](#), last February.

– I spoke on Transfiguration Sunday, the last Sunday in epiphany. In that story too, the skies open and Jesus hears a voice saying, ‘this is my son in whom I am well pleased.

–The reason I preached was that Soren was baptized that Sunday.

–Bokomoso kids were with us. When they found out there was to be a baptism, they offered to sing a blessing song from their land.

–Kris drummed in the background

–We had parents and friends who flew from around the country to be here and many friends and neighbors who came to be with us that day.

–You, our church family outdid yourself in hospitality. You put on a spread.

–We really pulled out the stops—it was a big party.

\* And Soren cried and squirmed through most of it.

– It was as if he had no idea how much work had gone into that day. As if he did not have a clue of how much we loved him. How could he be in such a bad mood? (Other than because he missed a nap?)

\* What is so abundantly clear to me, now that he is one year older, is that it does not matter. He can be cranky, hard and tough. He irritates me at times, but for the most part his behavior is irrelevant to my love.

– But he is my son, the beloved. In him, I am well pleased, no matter what.

## **CLOSING**

\* So what does all this mean? Where has all this rambling brought me?

1. New Years resolutions are a waste of time for me. I will fail.

2. Epiphany commitments on the other hand, are worth considering.

–Epiphany commitments have something to do with attempting to see What Christ is going to be up to this year, how he is manifesting himself in 2006 and how I might be a part of that.

3. If I want to see Christ, he may well be next to me in line. (In the grocery store, at the gas station, but especially at the shelter or with the Latinos I pass every day hoping someone hires them for the day.)

4. Like Jesus, it is worth putting myself in places where I am likely to hear God's voice reminding me that I am the beloved. Like Jesus, I am going to need it to live my call.

5. If it is so abundantly clear that my love for Soren is unconditional, why is it so hard for me to believe that God's love for me is the same? Moreover, what would it mean to live as if that were true?



AMEN