



Yes, BUT...
Isaiah 42:1-9; Matthew 3:13-17
Reverend Giuseppe Mattei (January 8, 2023)

Did you ever start a sentence by showing some level of agreement with another person and then following that up with your true opinion like in: “That sounds exquisite BUT...” or “I like your new hair style BUT...” We don’t want to sound too negative or hyper critical, so we soften the introduction to our disagreement and delay the real meaning of our thought in the hope of not hurting people’s feelings. “Yes, I am with you BUT...” The “BUT” waters down whatever we said earlier; it says we didn’t really mean it. we put too many BUTs into people’s faces. It’s the “BUTs” that get in the way of a more truthful communication.

The profound “BUTs” of our interaction can significantly shape our perception of ourselves. The “BUTs” have profound in-between interpretative meaning that convey messages of acceptance or rejection. (Hear the [Secret of Our Baptism](#) as told by the Rev. Dr. Heather Murray Elkins).

As Jesus comes up out of the water following his baptism by John, the heavens open, the Holy Spirit descends like a dove, and a voice from heaven affirms God’s relationship with Jesus with one carefully worded sentence: “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased” (Matt 3:17).

Imagine how different this story would be if the voice had said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, whom I love dearly, BUT I really think he needs to change a few things about himself.” Had the voice from heaven said those words, we might think God’s expressions of love are merely a way to sugarcoat criticism. God’s love would not be patient, forgiving, and all-accepting.

Or what if the voice from heaven had said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am often pleased because he can do some really excellent things.” Had God said those words, we might think that God’s love is limited to certain occasions or only connected to positive accomplishments. How hard is it to please God in your opinion?

Or what if God had said, “This is my Son, the beloved, and once he signs this agreement to obey me unto death, then I will love him forever.” In such a case, we might think that God’s love is a part of a conditional agreement, to be given out only once certain requirements have been met.

Thankfully, the voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased”, reminding us that in the waters of baptism, God’s love is freely given with no strings attached.

The voice calling from heaven assigns meaning and describes a vocation. The call is to bring justice to the nations, to strengthen the feeble hands, to embolden the hopeful, to open people’s eyes, and give freedom to prisoners (Isaiah 42). This the servant will do in the power of the One

who calls, the Maker of heaven and earth, the Giver of Life. The Spirit's power will energize the one accepting the call, and we are the ones being called, following Jesus and along with him.

May we be open and available for the work of God in us and through us. Amen.