



Cliff Notes – TouchPoint for January 30, 2019

Luke 4:14-30 *The Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth* [NRSV]

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” He said to them, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Doctor, cure yourself!’ And you will say, ‘Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.’” And he said, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown. But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.”

When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

Grace and Peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

“They got up, drove him out of town, and led him up to the brow of a hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff.”

Why do I get the feeling this Touchpoint isn’t going to end well? Sometimes I wonder about the people who came up with the Sunday readings, the Sunday Common Lectionary. Do they not like clergy? Did they not like their pastor?

“They got up, drove him out of town ... so that they might hurl him off the cliff.”

What am I supposed to do with this passage? How do I make it acceptable and self-affirming for you? How do I tame it and make it possible for you to stand up and sing “Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee” after hearing this? Or should I even try?

Jesus gets up and reads from the scroll of Isaiah.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has appointed me to bring good news to the poor...proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind and to let the oppressed go free.”
And then he says, *“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your midst.”*

Now at first the people are excited. The Messiah has come to them. To their hometown. Think of all the wonderful things he is going to do for them, all the great miracles. But Jesus doesn’t and won’t. He refers to Elijah and Elisha and the miracles they performed to non-Jews, the outsiders, the supposed ‘non-chosen’ of God. This is who Jesus has come for—all those on the ‘outs.’ Now this doesn’t go over well with his hometown folks. He is to be *their* Messiah...not *everyone’s* Messiah!

Pastor Mark Rossman, at Living Water Lutheran Church in Scottsdale, put it so well last Sunday when I heard him talk about how we want Jesus to be “MY” messiah and not “OUR” messiah. So basically, the rest of this Touchpoint is going to be a rip-off of his idea and this theme. Now, by “OUR” messiah, Pastor Mark didn’t mean the Lutheran Church or even Christianity. He meant the messiah of the world.

Which kind of makes sense when you think about it. I mean, if we say there is ONE God over all. ONE God who is Lord and ruler over all. ONE God who created and sustains ALL. Then why do we seek to limit God’s love, forgiveness and mercy to just a certain group of people? If God is God of ALL, then it must follow that God’s love, mercy and forgiveness, God’s grace, is for all.

So the Messiah is not “MY” messiah, but messiah of “ALL.” But that is not always well received. Because, when privilege is your baseline, grace for all can seem to be abandonment. When privilege is your baseline, grace for all can seem like betrayal. I certainly don’t want a shepherd who is going to leave me and 98 other sheep to go find the loser who wandered off. I much prefer a limited God who works with a limited number of people, who are like me, well behaved and a part of my fold.

Look, I’m all for God loving everyone, as long as God loves me first. I’m all for God being gracious to everyone, as long as God is gracious to me first. And you know why God should be gracious to me first? Because I DESERVE IT! “I DESERVE GOD’S GRACE and you need to work at deserving it too.” Don’t dwell on that statement very long. It’s not worth it.

The 1st century Jews were looking for a ‘MY’ messiah. One who would restore the fortunes of Israel. Take Israel back to the great days of King David. A messiah who would “Make Israel Great Again.” But a Messiah who was an “OUR” messiah, who would restore the world and all its inhabitants, who would care about the poor, the oppressed and the captives?—“No thank you” that is not what they wanted.

Now it would be easy to mock those first century Jews for their limited understanding. After all, we 21st century American Christians are so much more advanced and enlightened spiritually. You would never find an American Christian who would hitch his or her wagon, or hang his or her hat on a leader, a messiah, who only wanted to ‘Make America Great Again.’ A leader, a messiah, who had no regard for the poor and oppressed beyond our walls and borders. We American Christians would only follow a leader who would set free the captive, rather than cage and detain them and their children on our border. Why that thought is so absurd and ridiculous it’s almost not worth mentioning. Right? RIGHT?! “Lord have mercy on our American Christian soul.”

How do you want me to speak about this passage today? How do you want me to talk about the poor and not offend your sense of capitalism and free enterprise? How do you want me to speak about this passage today? How do you want me to talk about the oppressed and the captive and not speak of those we have walled off or put in detention camps? I’m dead serious! How do you want me to speak of this passage and ‘OUR’ messiah, the messiah of all, without you wanting to throw me off of a cliff? And if I could speak of the messiah in such a way that wouldn’t offend you, would it be the messiah we have in Jesus?

Let’s face it. We don’t want a messiah of ‘all’— a God of ‘all’— we don’t want a messiah, a God, who will come first and foremost to the poor and hurting of the world. We want a ‘limited God’ who will come to us individually, or me personally. We want a ‘limited God’ of me, myself and I. We don’t want a God of “all.” We want the “Clapper.” Someone we can ‘clap on’ and ‘clap off.’ Someone who will be there when we want, doing what we want, and then go away.

I remember reading a book on preaching many years ago. I believe the author was Fred Craddock, but I may be mistaken. And he wrote something to this effect, *“When you look at a text, you need to figure out what it is about the passage that would make people want to crucify Jesus for what he is saying or doing. If you don’t, you’re missing a great deal of the point. After all, everything Jesus said and did led to his crucifixion.”*

What a different way to read scripture. Not looking to limit the story to simply affirm who I am and how I think, but push me to look beyond myself and to the care and feeding of others.

*“Peter, do you love me?” Jesus asks... “Then feed my sheep.”
“I was hungry and you fed me. I was thirsty and you gave me drink.”*

What a different way to read scripture. Not looking to limit the story to simply affirm who I am and how I think, but push me to look beyond myself, and to the care and feeding of others. Not limiting the story to me, but seeing the story about all.

“They got up, drove him out of town... so that they might hurl him off the cliff.”

Fortunately, this is not the end of this passage or the story of Jesus. No, it ends with, *“But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.”*

Here is the ‘good news’ – they couldn’t stop or limit Jesus and neither can we. Jesus is going to continue **ON** his way and **IN** his way. They couldn’t stop or limit him in this passage and they couldn’t stop or limit him later. Even when they captured him and nailed him to a cross he didn’t stop being **ON** his way or being **IN** his way. From that cross he didn’t limit forgiveness, but pronounced forgiveness to those of us who are held captive by the idea of a ‘limited’ messiah who is only ‘my’ messiah. And three days later he announced ‘peace’ to those who had denied, betrayed and doubted him, and he told them to take that ‘peace’ to all the world.

And I can’t help but wondering if he didn’t add, “Nice try people. You get an ‘A’ for effort at trying to stop me. That crucifixion thing was pretty powerful, but what are going to do now. You gave it your best shot, but guess what—I’M BACK. Now if you’ll excuse me, I’m going to continue **ON** my way and **IN** my way, in your midst.”

“He passed through the midst of them and went on his way.”

Isn’t that our hope? Isn’t that our promise? That the messiah of ‘all’ will continue to pass in and through our midst and continue **on** and **in** his way. Forgiving, freeing, lifting up.

Isn’t that what we celebrate in this meal? A messiah who continues to come into our midst in bread and wine and those next to us. A messiah who continues on and in his way of re-connecting, re-uniting, re-remembering us to him and ‘all’ others. A messiah who cannot and will not be stopped or limited. Not by us. Not by life nor death.

*“They got up, drove him out of town..., so that they might hurl him off the cliff.
But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.”*

This is the story we have to tell. The story of a God who is bigger than we can imagine. The story of One who embraces more than we can embrace. One who is beyond our limits.

*“They got up, drove him out of town... so that they might hurl him off the cliff.
But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.”*

This is the story we have to tell—a story of a God who cannot be limited by our Cliff Notes.

Amen