



I AM (not) – TouchPoint for December 9, 2020

John 1:6-8, 19-31 There once was a man, his name John, sent by God to point out the way to the Life-Light. He came to show everyone where to look, who to believe in. John was not himself the Light; he was there to show the way to the Light.

TOUCH POINT

When Jews from Jerusalem sent a group of priests and officials to ask John who he was, he was completely honest. He didn't evade the question. He told the plain truth: "I am not the Messiah." They pressed him, "Who, then? Elijah?" "I am not." "The Prophet?" "No." Exasperated, they said, "Who, then? We need an answer for those who sent us. Tell us something—anything!—about yourself." John replied: "I'm thunder in the desert: 'Make the road straight for God!' I'm doing what the prophet Isaiah preached."

Those sent to question him were from the Pharisee party. Now they had a question of their own: "If you're neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet, why do you baptize?" John answered, "I only baptize using water. A person you don't recognize has taken his stand in your midst. He comes after me, but he is not in second place to me. I'm not even worthy to hold his coat for him." These conversations took place in Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing at the time.

The very next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and yelled out, "Here he is, God's Passover Lamb! He takes away the SIN of the world! This is the man I've been talking about, 'the One who comes after me but is really ahead of me.'"

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

"Who are you?" they asked ... and John confessed ... "I am not the Messiah." Poor John the Baptist. Such a low self-image.

"I am not the Messiah." Why if only he had lived in the age of Norman Vincent Peale, Tony Robbins, and Joel Osteen.

"I am not the Messiah." You know, I'd really like to have a "sit down" with John and read him the riot act.

"Why start with a negative, John? Where is the positive? All that negative thinking is not going to serve you well. With that kind of attitude, you might just end up wandering in the wilderness, living off of a starvation diet and wearing very uncomfortable clothes. What kind of role model would that be?"

And besides, where is your "What Would Jesus Do" bracelet, John? Don't you know that's all the rage for serious religious folk? Why aren't you wearing that? Here, let me give you one. I usually have an extra one sitting around I hand out to others.

What? You don't want it. Why not?? Oh, that's right. You're not the Messiah! So why bother asking what would Jesus do?"

You know, I'd really like to have a "come to Jesus moment" with John the Baptist, but then, that would just prove his point. John the Baptist is such an out of place individual. He doesn't look out for #1. He doesn't point to himself. He seems more interested in saying what he is not than what he is. And even when he speaks about himself, it is only as a pointer, a direction sign ... to something else...someone else. Why, John just wouldn't make it in our society! Not a chance. Now, like then, he would be nothing but a voice crying in the wilderness.

And yet, scripture tells us that there were many people who went out to hear John and be baptized by him. What was the attraction? What was the appeal? What point deep inside of us is touched by one who says, “I am not the Messiah”?

Well, in Mark's gospel, John the Baptist speaks about repentance for the forgiveness of sins. But in the last few verses of today's passage, when John sees Jesus he says, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the SIN of the world.” Notice it is not sins, plural, with a small 's'. But the word is SIN, and you can read that with a capital 'S'.

And what is that SIN Jesus takes away. What is the big SIN Jesus takes from us and the one that causes all the little sins we need to repent from? Well, if we go back to Genesis and the 2nd chapter. We see the BIG SIN – the original sin – was wanting to be god-like.

But that is all our society tells us we are. We are god of our lives. We are in control. We are the masters of our fate and captains of our ship. It all depends on us, not as a group...mind you...NO...it all depends on you and me as individuals. And I am reminded of a Nike commercial from years ago, at least I believe it was Nike, and basically all it had in it was people holding up signs saying, “I AM.”

Now that's a blasphemy by biblical standards...and genius marketing by our culture's norms. You see, if we go back to Genesis and the 2nd chapter. We see the BIG SIN – the original sin – was wanting to be god-like. Hmmmm, that's interesting...the original sin is overstepping one's boundaries. Moving outside of one's lane, as it were, wanting to be bigger and more than one was created to be.

Maybe John the Baptist is on to something with this, “I am not the Messiah” thing. Perhaps that should be my morning prayer 'mantra' this Advent season...

“I am not the Messiah.”

But JUST for this advent season, after all, let's not get carried away and take it into the New Year. And yet, there is something exhausting and life killing in always having to be the Messiah, the savior. And I'm not just talking about the world, but one's own life, one's spouse or partner. One's children or business.

It's exhausting and life killing to live in this whole “it's up to you and only you” mentality.

I recently read an article, unfortunately I can't remember where or by whom, but the basic point was that we are killing ourselves in this country through the fanatic belief in the freedom of the individual. And the author's basic point was that connections, relationships, and cooperative endeavors are all seen as a sign of weakness. Others are seen as competitors to us rather complimentors of us...It is only the individual that matters.

But this has led to alienation, separation, depression and anger as we realize we can't do it all ourselves, no matter how great we are, and we realize we are not enough. And so, we turn the anger either in on ourselves (think of the addiction crisis in this country) or out towards those who are different than us. Just turn on the TV if you don't believe me. Better yet, DON'T turn on the TV, turn it off, and just trust me on this one.

“I am not the Messiah” or even 'Elijah or the prophet' John adds later. Perhaps John the Baptist is onto something.

I can't tell you the number of bible studies I have been in where we have been looking at stories of people in the bible and inevitably someone will say something like, "I pray to God to give me the 'faith of Abraham'." Or, "I pray to God to give me the 'wisdom of Solomon'." Or, "I pray to God to give me the 'patience of Job'."

The last time it happened I couldn't contain myself anymore, and so I just blurted out, "I'm sorry, those titles have been taken. Why don't you just pray to God to make you the 'George' God created you to be." (by the way, her name wasn't George, so don't try to figure out who it was.)

"I am not the Messiah."

Perhaps this is why so many people came out to see John. He wasn't trying to be someone else. He wasn't trying to imitate someone else. He was simply admitting who he was and calling people to admit who they were. Sins and all, warts and all. You see, you can admit who you are when you don't have to save yourself. You can admit your brokenness when you don't have to be your own savior. You can admit your sin when there is a Lamb of God who will take it away.

And when you admit you are not the Messiah, you actually get your life back as a gift – to be lived – and not something you have to save.

Jesus saves us from our thinking we need to be god-like... by being God for us.

Jesus saves us from our thinking we need to be the messiah... by becoming the Messiah for us.

This is the SIN the Lamb of God takes away from the world – our trying to be or become THAT which we think we NEED to be. Because when you realize you are not the Messiah, you actually get your life back as a gift – to be lived – and not something you have to save.

"I am not the Messiah" ... Maybe John is onto something after all.

"I am not the Messiah" ... Maybe that's not a bad way to start every day.

"I am not the Messiah" ... And maybe that's a good way to end our time together.

Because you see, when you admit you are not the Messiah, you stop looking to yourself for all the answers, and become open to the Spirit's movement through others.

And when you admit you are not the Messiah, it actually opens you up to meet the Messiah out in the world – outside of yourself.

And here in this meal, we do. Here in this meal we meet the one who speaks God's forgiveness, grace and mercy over us. Here in this meal we meet the one who gives himself for the sake of others.

Here in this meal we meet the 'good news' that Jesus is the Messiah. And I'm not. And you're not! Because that title has been taken.

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Songs

Be Still

Be Still, know that I am God

Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel

O, Come, O, Come Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel. That mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear. Rejoice, Rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee O Israel.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Of the Father's Love Begotten

Of the Father's love begotten, Ere the worlds began to be, He is Alpha and Omega,
He the source, the ending He. Of the things that are, that have been,
And that future years shall see, Evermore and evermore!
O that birth forever blessed, When the virgin, full of grace,
By the Spirit blessed conceiving, Bore the Savior of our race; And the Babe, the world's Redeemer,
First revealed His sacred face, evermore and evermore!
Let the heights of heaven adore Him; Angel hosts, His praises sing; Powers, dominions, bow before Him, and
extol our God and King! Let no tongue on earth be silent, Every voice in concert ring, Evermore and evermore!
Christ, to You with God the Father, Spirit blessed eternally, Hymn and chant and high thanksgiving, And
unending praises be: Honor, glory, and dominion, And eternal victory, Evermore and evermore! Amen.

The Meal

Lo, How a Rose E're Blooming

Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming. From tender stem has sprung! Of Jesse's lineage coming, As those of old have
sung. It came, a blossom bright, Amid the cold of winter, When half spent was the night.

Isaiah 'twas foretold it, The Rose I have in mind; With Mary we behold it, The virgin mother kind. To show
God's love aright, She bore to us a Savior, When half spent was the night.

This Flow'r, whose fragrance tender. With sweetness fills the air, Dispels with glorious splendor The darkness
everywhere. It came, a blossom bright, Amid the cold of winter, When half spent was the night.

Benediction

For Unto Us a Child Is Born

For unto us a child is born, Unto us a son is given. And the government shall be upon his shoulder. And his
name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.