



TOUCH POINT

A Defining Moment – TouchPoint for February 21, 2021

Mark 8:31-38 MSG ²⁹ Jesus then asked, “And you—what are you saying about me? Who am I?” Peter gave the answer: “You are the Christ, the Messiah.”

³⁰⁻³² Jesus warned them to keep it quiet, not to breathe a word of it to anyone. He then began explaining things to them: “It is necessary that the Son of Man proceed to an ordeal of suffering, be tried and found guilty by the elders, high priests, and religion scholars, be killed, and after three days rise up alive.” He said this simply and clearly so they couldn’t miss it. ³²⁻
³³ But Peter grabbed him in protest.

Turning and seeing his disciples wavering, wondering what to believe, Jesus confronted Peter. “Peter, get out of my way! Satan, get lost! You have no idea how God works.”

³⁴⁻³⁷ Calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, “Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You’re not in the driver’s seat; I am. Don’t run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I’ll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to saving yourself, your true self. What good would it do to get everything you want and lose you, the real you? What could you ever trade your soul for?

³⁸ “If any of you are embarrassed over me and the way I’m leading you when you get around your fickle and unfocused friends, know that you’ll be an even greater embarrassment to the Son of Man when he arrives in all the splendor of God, his Father, with an army of the holy angels.”

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

“But Peter grabbed him in protest.”

It’s a question of definitions. What is the essence of the Christ? What is the end game of the Divine? What does it mean to be ‘saved’? Or what is ‘salvation’?

This is what is getting worked out in this passage. And it’s not something we can gloss over. In the previous verses, Jesus asks the disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” And Peter answers with the correct title, the correct noun, “You are the Christ.” But he gets the verb all wrong. He has no clue what it means to be the Christ. And so, we must be clear when we use words like ‘Christ’, ‘God’ and ‘salvation or being saved’. What do we mean? Because like Peter, we can think we got it right and end up getting it so wrong.

Peter after all, gets it wrong. That’s why he is rebuked. He isn’t rebuked because he has the right answer. He is rebuked because he’s got it all wrong. Oh, he has the right title for Jesus, the right noun. But he has the verb all wrong. And guess what is more important.

You see, you can call Jesus the Christ. But if your definition of the Christ is power and glory and prosperity, well, you’re in for a rebuke. Naming the Christ doesn’t mean we get to define the Christ. The definition of the Christ is left up to Jesus. And it is one who suffers and dies. One who becomes **at-one** with the hungry, the thirsty, the imprisoned and marginalized in this world.

That is why the rebuke of Peter is a rebuke to more than Peter not wanting Jesus to suffer and die. It is a rebuke to our being in control. Our wanting to be in the driver’s seat. I’m sorry, but God is not your CO-pilot. What a pompous and arrogant bumper sticker!

The rebuke of Peter is a rebuke to us having the final say over who and what God is. And how God should be and act.

“Who do you say that I am?”

The answer to that question says more about us than it says about Jesus. We are revealed in the answer, not Jesus. And what is revealed is that we want a God of escape rather than atonement, at-one-ment. That is what the word atonement means. To be AT-ONE in any moMENT.

And so, there is another definition at stake here. It is the definition of the divine. In Aramaic, the word for the divine is 'Allaha'. And it has as its core essence, Unity, Wholeness, Oneness. A bringing or coming together of all things. Where all things are working at-one with one another.

In English, the word for the divine is 'God'. It comes from the German word "good" and it implies separating the good from the bad. At its core essence, the divine is one who separates the good from the bad.

These two definitions are at their heart incompatible. Separation and unity are not compatible. Which leads to another definition we need to look at. The word 'save' or 'salvation'. The Greek word is 'soter' and it doesn't so much mean escape or rescue as it means 'healing, wholeness'. A suggestion for you, if I may. Anytime you hear the words 'saved' or 'salvation', in Christian circles, substitute the words 'healing, wholeness'. It will get you to a place truer to the message of the statement.

So, to say, "For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it." Means...

"For whoever wants wholeness in their life on their own, will become sick. And those who seek wholeness in me and the greater good, will find healing."

If God is a god of separation, then saving or salvation will be escape or rescue, which is what Peter wants. But if God is a god of **unity**, wholeness, at-one-ness, then the Christ must suffer and die... to be **at-one** with all of humanity. And for Jesus, 'At-one-ment' is the cornerstone of salvation... healing, wholeness, not escape.

If we are honest with ourselves, we don't want a God of 'at-one-ment'. We want a God of escape, transcendence. If only Jesus had said, "Take up your empty tomb and follow me." Now that I could get behind! Victory! Glory! Conquest! Unfortunately, that is not what he said. But rather:

"If any want to become my followers...let them take up their cross and follow me..."

Now to "take up one's cross" does not mean we deal with the little irritants and annoyances of life without complaining or creating a fuss. Those things are not a cross. Neither does it refer to some sort of masochism where we seek to punish ourselves into sainthood. You can't punish yourself into sainthood. And besides, nobody likes people with a martyr complex.

No, to "Take up one's cross" means to join in the suffering of the world. To enter into it. To be a place, a person, where those who suffer can come and find a space of grace and comfort and connection.

If we are honest with ourselves, we don't want a God of 'at-one-ment', we want a God of escape, transcendence. If only Jesus had said, "Take up your empty tomb and follow me." Now that I could get behind! Victory! Glory! Conquest! No, like Peter, we want a bubble bath god, a Calgon God, who will "Take me away." I wonder if anyone under 50 will get that comment. Oh, Well!

But here is the Christ. Saying he must suffer and die. He must enter into the suffering of this world.

Because it seems that the only way to transform suffering is to walk into it, face it, and embrace it as it were. Talk to anyone who has been through recovery, and they will tell you that it was only when they confronted, faced and dare I say embraced their addiction that healing began. And even then, one still bears the scars of the battle – it still remains a part of one's history – though not the final word.

One's suffering and one's healing are intertwined. They are not two separate events but forever connected. Just like Good Friday and Easter Sunday. How else do we explain that the risen Lord still carries the marks and wounds of the crucifixion in his being?

A 'Christ', a "Messiah" who is only triumphant is not a God of comfort, but of judgment. Because my life stands in stark contrast, my life with its failings, its starts and stops, its 2 steps forward and 1 step back, and many times, 1 step forward and 2 steps back.

No, a God who is only triumphant is a God who is frightening to me...untouchable to me...a God who stands in sharp contrast and judgment to whom I am. But a God who suffers...a Christ who suffers...a Messiah who suffers...now here is a connection. C.S. Song puts it well:

The suffering of Jesus the messiah has removed all human barriers. It makes God available to human beings and enables them to be part of the divine mystery of salvation. The depths of God's suffering ought to be the place where all persons, despite their different backgrounds and traditions, can recognize one another as fellow pilgrims in need of God's saving power.

Religious traditions tend to alienate strangers. Ecclesiastical structures become walls surrounding faithful believers. Doctrinal precision creates heretics and infidels. Even expressions of religious devotion in worship and liturgy makes people alien to one another.

Suffering however, does not need to be transmitted by traditions. It is present here and now, as well as in the past. It needs no ecclesiastical sanction; it comes and goes without anyone's bidding. It does not have to be defended doctrinally; it is our daily experience. It cannot be worshiped and adored by fine liturgy; it is to be endured and not idolized. To be human is to suffer, and God knows that. That is why God suffers too. Suffering is where God and human beings meet... Suffering brings us closer to God and God closer to us.

So, you see, to take up one's cross means to enter fully into the human condition, which involves suffering. We enter into suffering with those who suffer not because we are the cure – nor do we possess the cure – rather we enter into suffering with the world because that is where the cure, the transformation, the healing is found.

So while there may not be an "answer" to human suffering, there is an "answerer". One who befriends us in our suffering. Which is a more believable answer than what all the late-night infomercials try to offer and sell.

There is an "answerer". One who befriends us in our suffering.

"I was hungry and you fed ME." "I was thirsty and you gave ME drink." "My blessing on the poor in spirit." "My blessing on those who mourn."

This is where the Christ locates Christ's very self. With the poor, the mournful, the suffering. We enter into the suffering of the world not just so that others will meet the Christ, but so that we may meet Christ there

as well.

In his suffering...in our suffering...in the suffering of others...All are “re-membered”. All are AT-ONED.

We find our wholeness in our brokenness... re-membered, at-oned, with the one who has taken the brokenness of the world into himself and become brokenness himself.

“Where brokenness meets brokenness” ... We are AT-ONED.

And we are healed and transformed.

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taize Choir)
Be Still, know that I am God

Create in Me

(The Concordia Choir)

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence and take not the holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation and uphold me with thy free spirit.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

See Him

(Keith Duke)

See him: 1) silent and lifeless. 2) alone and forlorn 3) broken and helpless...Crowned with a garland of thorns 4) as son and as brother 5) related to all 6) through the grief of a mother...hurting the most of all 7) as healer and teacher 8) as helper and friend 9) as prophet and preacher...

Ignore Him??? I doubt if you can.

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer

(Our Father 3, Choirs of Annunciation Byzantine Church)

Benediction

Gaelic Blessing/Deep Peace

(John Rutter, The Cambridge Singers)

Deep peace of the running wave to you. Deep peace of the flowing air to you.

Deep peace of the quiet earth to you. Deep peace of the shining stars to you.

Deep peace of the gentle night to you. Moon and stars pour their healing light on you.

Deep peace of Christ, of Christ the light of the world to you.

Deep peace of Christ to you.