



TOUCH POINT

Fore!!! TouchPoint for April 14, 2021

Luke 24 :36b-48 ³⁶ While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”^[l] ³⁷ They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. ³⁸ He said to them, “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹ Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” ⁴⁰ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.^[m] ⁴¹ While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish,⁴³ and he took it and ate in their presence.

⁴⁴ Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.” ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶ and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah^[n] is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses^[o] of these things.

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

“... repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”

What a strange way to talk about repentance. I mean, how does one proclaim repentance? Isn't repentance something you demand, require, insist upon? So how does one proclaim it. Proclamation comes after the fact. Proclamation declares what has already happened. Or proclamation makes it happen, as in the Emancipation Proclamation. That proclamation created the emancipation. So, what is it that can be proclaimed that makes repentance happen? What is it that can be proclaimed that can create repentance?

You see, the word 'repent' means to 'change one's mind' or 'be turned around.' Or to put it modern day terms: to undergo a paradigm shift, to take on a new perspective, to experience a fundamental shift in one's reality. It isn't simply about reshaping one's morality or feeling guilty about past behavior – though that may be a part of it. It is about a transformation.

So, what is it that can be proclaimed that can bring about a reorientation, a paradigm shift? I would suggest it is forgiveness that can bring about repentance, bring about a transformation.

Forgiveness leads to repentance. Repentance does not lead to forgiveness. Let me repeat that, because that is what I like to do.

Forgiveness leads to repentance. Repentance does not lead to forgiveness.

Eugene Peterson's bible translation puts it so well,

“a total life-change through the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed in his name to all nations”

I would encourage you to get his translation of the Bible. It doesn't so much translate the words as it tries to communicate the meaning. It is simple, down to earth, but with incredible insight and perspective.

“a total life-change through the forgiveness of sins...”

So, let's take a look at this word 'forgive'. Because I think that the truth that forgiveness comes before repentance is contained in the word 'forgive' itself.

FOR-GIVE. To for-give means to give before. Think of the phrase 'fore-gone conclusion' or 'fore-knowledge'. Or maybe the word 'fore-ground'. It is what comes first. What comes before. So, to 'for-give' means to give before.... first. If sin is brokenness, or broken relationship...then to for-give another is to give yourself back into the healing of the relationship before the other does anything. As you for-give yourself to the healing of another...they are for-given.

You've heard of the phrase 'paying it forward.' Well to for-give means 'giving yourself forward.'

Now let me say a short word, or take a short detour, to speak to those who have been divorced or in abusive relationships. Because forgiveness has often been used to perpetuate relationships of abuse and brokenness. Look, to give yourself back into a continuing cycle of abuse and brokenness does no one any good. That's not forgiveness, that's enabling.

But if you choose to do that, God will fore-give you. God fore-gives those who choose to stay in a marriage or relationship of abuse and destruction, just as God fore-gives those who choose to leave a marriage or relationship. It's not like one of those relationships needs forgiveness and the other doesn't. Both parties in both of those relationships need God's fore-giving self.

You see, God does not desire us to perpetuate brokenness. Sometimes the most healing and fore-giving thing you can do in a relationship is to leave it. At times that is the best thing for both of you. Sometimes, entering into the brokenness of divorce is the only way for both to heal. Sometimes, it takes dying to our desire for self-righteous purity, to give the possibility for both people to be resurrected to wholeness. The idea that a 'vow' is more important than the health of two people is rather twisted. Sometimes, it may require you fore-giving yourself into the dissolution of a relationship that is in a death spiral, for healing to occur.

After all, Jesus fore-gives himself into sin and death on a singular level, so healing and resurrection can occur on a larger level. Jesus walks into the crucifixion so he can walk out of the empty tomb to new life. Some of us have faced that same issue in the relationships of our own lives. We've had to walk into the crucifixion of divorce, in order to be resurrected to a new life from the tomb of a dead marriage.

Now back to the word forgiveness. What does forgiveness have to do with repentance? Well, I don't repent or change in order to be for-given. I repent... am changed... *because* I have been for-given. I have been given something before anything else. If I had to repent before I am for-given than it wouldn't be for-giveness. It would be *after-giveness*. God gives after I repent.

But Jesus doesn't hang on the cross and say, "Father after-give them...once they realize what they have done." No. He says, "Father, for-give them... even in their ignorance." "Give them your love... your grace... your mercy." "Give them yourself" before anything else. In other words, "Do something first, Father, that will change them, transform them, turn them around and give them a new paradigm from which to live."

I turn around – I get turned around – because something new has come along. I get my mind changed – I have a paradigm shift – because I have encountered a new paradigm: a paradigm of for-giveness, of being given before. How is that new? Well, we live in a reward and merit society. You get what you deserve after

you have completed your assignment, your task, your test. We in our society practice after-giveness. We give after the fact, after the event, after the deed. We don't for-give anything. We after-give.

Though there is one exception that I can think of: golfing. Look when I go golfing, I scream a lot of words out very loudly. Most of which I can't say here. But probably the word I scream the most is "FORE!!!" Now I scream that because a ball is heading at someone who it shouldn't be heading towards. I yell "FORE!" because something is on its way... something is about to happen... that hasn't happened yet. And it should probably bring about a paradigm shift in how the people it's heading for should act. They should DUCK!!! I don't wait until they have been hit and then yell, "AFTER!" What good would that do??? No, I yell, "FORE!" Before.

So, to be for-given is to be given before anything else is done, accomplished or finished. This is what we are to proclaim to the world, to All nations. God has for-given you, me and the world. God has given us love, grace and mercy before all else. God is a for-giving God.

God is not an after-giving God. God doesn't wait to first see how good you are... or how you turn out... or if you measure up or not. And then decide if you should be given anything. God does not after-give. God for-gives grace, mercy, life, goodness. From the preface to the 10 commandments, to the promise in Jeremiah, God says, "I will be your God and you will be my people." This is the starting point. This is the baseline. This is ground zero. This is God's first word. Before all else. This is God's fore-word of all that is to come.

It is only this for-giving God that can change, turn around, and bring a paradigm shift to our after-giving world.

It is only this for-giving God that can bring a death and resurrection to our after-giving ways. And we who have experienced this for-giveness are called to proclaim the for-giving of God in Christ Jesus.

Is this what Paul meant when he wrote, "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly"? God for-gave Christ to the world be-fore it did anything. God for-gave the world be-fore it turned around. Be-fore it repented, God gave. God for-gave Christ to the world so that it might be transformed, turned around, experience a new paradigm, a paradigm shift, from which to live.

In the night be-fore he was betrayed, Jesus took bread and wine, and he GAVE, He FORE-GAVE himself, to Peter and Judas and James and John and the rest of them. He gave, He for-gave himself to them be-fore they had even given him their denials and betrayals, much less their confessions and repentance. On that night, they weren't turning around **TO** him (repenting), they were turning **AWAY FROM** him.

And on that night, he doesn't after-give, he doesn't wait to see if they are worthy. No, he for-gives Himself to them, before anything else.

Here in this meal. Jesus for-gives himself to us in the face of our brokenness. Gives himself to us, and for us, and in us. Before we do anything.

Here in this meal, we are fed and for-given God's love, grace and mercy. So that we might feed, and for-give to others God's love, grace and mercy, too.

"FORE!!!!"

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Song

Be Still

(London Fox Taize Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God.

Spirit Divine

(Keith Duke)

Spirit of Love, enfold and teach us.
Spirit of Peace, rest deep within
Spirit of change, transform and heal us
Spirit Divine

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Healer of Our Every Ill

(Marty Haugen)

Healer of our every ill, light of each tomorrow. Give us peace beyond our fear, and hope
beyond our sorrow.

You who know our fears and sadness. Grace us with your peace and gladness.

Spirit of all comfort, fill our hearts. *Refrain*

In the pain and joy beholding, how your grace is still unfolding

Give us all your vision God of love. *Refrain*

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer

(Taize Reflections)

Benediction

A Celtic Blessing

(Margaret Rizza)

The guarding of the God of Life be on you, the guarding of loving Christ be on you,
the guarding of the Holy Spirit be on you, to aid and uphold you each day and night of your life.

The guarding of God, the guarding of Christ, the guarding of the Spirit be upon you.