



TOUCH POINT

The Un-Folding of God – TouchPoint for April 21

John 10:11-18 (NRSV)¹¹ “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³ The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep.

¹⁶ I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes^[a] it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”

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

“I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.”

I saw a license plate just this past week as I was driving on the 101 S. It read YHWHNME. YHWH I'm assuming is Yahweh. N = 'and,' ME = 'me.' Those last two letters really threw me. Yahweh and me. How quaint? How wonderfully private! My own little pocket God that I can carry around. Me and my little buddy. Yahweh and me. Why, we could star in our own buddy action movie. Kind of like Starsky and Hutch, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid... Yahweh and Me. Though it should probably be ME and Yahweh, because, after all, God is **MY** co-pilot.

I suppose I shouldn't be too hard on the guy. He did give me inspiration for this touchpoint.

“I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold.”

Wait, other sheep. There are other sheep. I thought it was just me and Jesus. I thought I had my own personal Lord and Savior – my own personal shepherd.

“I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also.”

Uh Oh! You mean Jesus might leave me to go get others. I hope they are deserving. I certainly hope they are not like that one sheep in our flock of 100 who likes to wander off. I'm pretty sure Jesus wouldn't leave the 99 to go after that guy. That would certainly be irresponsible on Jesus' part. And kind of upset this whole 'Yahweh and Me' thing.

“I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold...who need to hear my voice. So I can bring them into the fold and there will be one flock and one shepherd.”

We live in a country that focuses on the individual. We talk about individual rights. That we are each as individuals given unalienable rights. Am I not entitled to it just being Yahweh and Me?! Is it

not my right as an individual to have an individual God?!

So what do we do with a God who speaks in communal terms? Group terms? Who speaks of folds and flocks...? What does that say to the idea of Yahweh and Me? Well, at least I can still say 'Yahweh and Us.' You know... 'Us'. I and us are a part of Christ's fold. I can live with that. I think. Good people like you and me in my FOLD.

But what do we do with a God who speaks not only of me and us as being a part of a fold, but that there are other folds? There are other groups. Tribes as it were.

"I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd."

You mean there are other groups, not like ME... not like US!! And Jesus wants to include them? Now THIS is not only bigger than Yahweh and Me. It's even bigger than Yahweh and US.

Jesus' flock now includes Yahweh and THEM.

You know, "THEM". We all have 'thems' in our lives. 'Those' people. "Them". The ones who are to blame for all the problems of the world, or at the very least, all my problems. 'Those' people who watch that other cable news network. Vote that other way. 'Those' people from 'THAT' country or of 'THAT' generation who are the problem... because as we all know, the 'baby boomers' were always the hardest working and never felt entitled.

And now Jesus is going to include 'them'... 'those' people. I suppose that is OK. As long as they join our fold, and become like us, RIGHT?!?

I think it is interesting that Jesus says he is going to bring in sheep from another fold to be a part of his flock. Now, not wanting to get too word detailed, I think it is important to know the difference between a flock and a fold.

A FOLD is a holding pen. It has walls. It is the walls that keep the sheep together. The sheep are kept together by their separation from the world. The sheep are kept together by their boundaries. Trying to keep certain things in and certain things out. And there are limits to what the FOLD can hold. How many sheep it can contain.

A flock is different. It is held together by a shepherd. It is not kept together by its separation from the world, its boundaries, rules or laws... No, it is held together by following the shepherd out into the world. There is no limit to the number of sheep that can follow the shepherd. And in fact, the shepherd might have many different folds in which he keeps the sheep.

Now personally, I prefer being in a fold rather than a flock. It's much safer and more comfortable. Enfold me in a FOLD with good people like me.

So what does it mean to be a sheep of the Good Shepherd? Am I looking for my own individual stall? Yahweh and Me! Or a fold of like-minded others? Yahweh and Us! How do I feel about a God who has other sheep, in other folds? Who I have never met and may never know? How do I feel about Yahweh and Them?

Did John actually mean it when he wrote in 3:16: "For God so loved THE WORLD." Is God bigger and does God's grace reach farther than I can imagine?

Or are we more like those William Barclay spoke about when he wrote in a poem,

"We are God's chosen few,
All others will be damned,
There is no room in heaven for you:
We can't have heaven crammed."

Richard Rohr puts it well when he writes,

"How can we imagine God as caring about us if God does not care about everything else too? If God chooses and doles out care, we are always going to be insecure and unsure whether we are among the lucky recipients."

Of course, it is often this insecurity that is the foundation of so many religious institutions. "Only we are the worthy ones! Only we are the true ones!" It may be good religious business to play on this insecurity, but it certainly isn't how Jesus saw things.

"I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd."

Perhaps God wants us to fold up our FOLDS ... or unfold them ... whatever image works for you.

It seems the only criteria Jesus puts on us sheep is that they hear his voice. His voice of forgiveness, grace and mercy.

Look, I may be one of the chosen of God, but that doesn't mean I get to choose who else is. Let me repeat that: I may be one of the chosen of God, but that doesn't mean I get to choose who else is. All who hear the voice of love, grace and mercy are a part of Christ's flock. Even those who wander off? Yes. Even those who deny him? Yes. Even those who betray him? Absolutely Yes! Because that is whom Jesus came to speak to... to call.

"Those who are well do not need a physician, but those who are sick do. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." Wait! Those are the people I kick out of my FOLD...

"Those who are well do not need a physician, but those who are sick do. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." Is that even a flock I want to be a part of?!?

In the night in which he was betrayed, Jesus took bread and wine and said, "This is my body and blood, given for YOU and for ALL people..." That means... Yahweh and ME. Yahweh and YOU. Yahweh and US. Yahweh and THEM.

One flock and one shepherd.

Maybe it's time to fold up our FOLDS and listen to his voice.

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.