



TOUCH POINT

Call the Next Witness – TouchPoint for May 12, 2021

Acts 1:1-11 NRSV *1 In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning² until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. ⁴While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. “This,” he said, “is what you have heard from me; ⁵for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”*

⁶So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

⁹When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

¹⁰While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. ¹¹They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

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

“Why are you standing looking up toward heaven?” and “You will be my witnesses.”

“Why are you standing looking up towards heaven?”

Why am I standing looking up towards heaven? Because I like to... because it's easy... because I was so often told that was what Christianity was about. To look up to Jesus, to admire Jesus, to gaze upon Jesus...

Now it's not quite up there with singing “We are climbing Jacobs ladder” ... that's the ultimate in personal piety ... but it's awfully close.

Why am I standing looking up towards heaven? Because I would much rather worship Jesus than follow him.

Henry Emerson Fosdick wrote this back in 1933 and unfortunately, it still applies to me today.

“The world has tried in two ways to get rid of Jesus; first by crucifying him, and second, by worshiping him. The first did not succeed. It required more than a cross to stop the influence of that transcendent character... the cross did not crush him, it lifted him.

The world, therefore, foiled in its first attempt to be rid of Jesus by crucifying him, turned to the second, a far more subtle and fatal way of disposing of great spiritual leadership—it worshiped him. Throughout history it has been true that when a spiritual leader has been too powerful to be crushed by opposition there has been another way to escape his moral insights and his ethical demands, and that is to worship him. To dress him up in elaborate metaphysical creeds, hide his too piercing eyes in the smoke of sacramental adoration, build beautiful sanctuaries where his challenging social ideals may fade out in vague mysticism, get him off somewhere on a high altar,

pray to him, sing to him, do anything for him rather than let him get back again where he started, walking the common ways of men and talking about how to live—that has always been the most successful way of getting rid of Jesus.”

Ouch!

Why am I standing looking towards heaven? Errr, uhhh... never mind.

So what can turn me away from looking up towards heaven. What can repent me? How about these words. “*You will be my witnesses.*” Well, that would certainly give me a different focus... and turn me around from staring off into space.

The first thing that strikes me is that this is such different wording from Matthew. Jesus’ final command for the disciples in Matthew is to “Go and make disciples of all nations.”

Now I must confess, I have never felt comfortable with that. And the reason is that I don't think I would ever be open to someone who was coming to me to make me into something different.

Imagine you were to say to someone you just met, “Hi, why are you here?” And they were to reply, “I'm here TO MAKE YOU a disciple of Buddha, or Mohammad, or Krishna.”

“Really, nice to meet you, too. But unless you are here to make me eat a pizza, leave me alone.” Nobody likes being MADE into anything, religious or otherwise.

The second reason is because of my experience in Japan as a missionary, where I went with Matthew’s words ringing in my ear.

And there – to my surprise – I discovered many people who were already disciples of Christ. Much more so than I was ... even if they couldn't name him ... even if they had never heard of him. They were much more involved in loving their neighbor, tending to those in need, than I ever could have been in that culture. In fact, they didn't so much make me into a disciple of Christ, they simply were a witness to Christ in how they lived. It was head spinning. They were witnesses of Christ to me in that culture.

So on one hand, I much prefer this statement, “*You will be my witnesses*” ... but on the other hand.

You WILL BE my witness. The gospel reading for this Sunday has Jesus saying, 'You ARE my witnesses.’’

You ARE... my witnesses.

Not 'please be a witness'... not 'consider being a witness' ... No, you ARE a witness.

Witnessing is not an option. It's who we are and what we do. But it's not only who we are and what we do – It's how others see and perceive God.

No wonder I would rather just stand looking up towards heaven. I've got more excuses than Moses at the burning bush as to why God should choose someone else to be a witness. But as we heard last week, we didn't choose Christ. Christ chose us. Because somewhere in the entire mess and chaos of my life, God sees something worth sharing, something worth witnessing to.

To say we are witnesses gives witness to our own stories, our own touchpoints with this resurrected Lord. To say we are witnesses is to say that God has worked in our lives as well. And that may be the toughest truth to believe of all. That God has something to witness to... through me and my life. God has claimed us. God has claimed our life stories as God's story. It's simply a done deal. Our lives witness **TO** God's work, even as we are witnesses **OF** God's work.

To say our lives witness **TO** God, then, does not depend on our acceptance, approval, or agreement. It does not depend on our readiness or responsiveness. It doesn't depend on our oratory or persuasive skills, and it doesn't depend on me making you into anything.

Even in our doubts, our life story is a witness. Think of Thomas. Even in our denial, our life story is a witness. Think of Peter. Even in our betrayal, our life story is a witness. Think of Judas.

Perhaps this is what Paul meant when he wrote of God saying to him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." And then Paul added, "for when I am weak, then I am strong."

To say our lives witness **TO** God, then, does not depend on our acceptance, approval, or agreement. It does not depend on our readiness or responsiveness. It doesn't depend on our oratory or persuasive skills, and it doesn't depend on me making you into anything.

It's simply who we are.

You ARE my witnesses. Not only to what you have seen ... but to what I have done to you and through you.

And with all due apologies to one of my mom's all-time favorite hymns, we are not to "Love to tell the story of UNSEEN things above." That line never made sense to me. How do you tell the story of something you have never seen?

No, we are witnesses to SEEN things. What has happened and is happening. Here and now. In you and me. This God who calls us away from our staring out into space to witness and see Him in the hungry, the poor, the sick and the prisoners.

This God who calls us away from our staring up into heaven to witness and see Him in our own life's story.

This God who calls us away from looking upward... to witness and see Him present even in our doubts and fears, denials and betrayals... as well as witnessing and seeing Him in others doubts and fears, denials and betrayals. This God who gives witness to His grace in our weakness as well as in others weakness...

In the night in which he was betrayed, Jesus took bread and wine, and said this is me, for you...

Come witness again God's grace... in this meal... in your life... and in the life of others.

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Song

Be Still

(London Fox Taize Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God.

Calm Me Lord

(Margaret Rizza)

Calm me Lord as you calmed the storm.
Still me Lord, keep me from harm.
Let all the tumult within me cease.
Enfold me Lord, in your peace.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Come Drink of Living Water

(London Fox Taize Choir)

Come drink of living water. Never thirst again.

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer

(Monastery Choir of St. John of San Francisco)

Benediction

The Lord Bless You and Keep You

(John Rutter, St. Paul's Cathedral Choir)

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you. To shine upon you and be gracious unto you. The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon you. And give you peace....