



**TOUCH POINT**

## Are We Participants or Observers? TouchPoint for July 14, 2021

**Mark 6: 30-44** <sup>30</sup> The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. <sup>31</sup> He said to them, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. <sup>32</sup> And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. <sup>33</sup> Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. <sup>34</sup> As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. <sup>35</sup> When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, “This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; <sup>36</sup> send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat.” <sup>37</sup> But he answered them, “You give them something to eat.” They said to him, “Are we to go and buy two hundred denari<sup>[a]</sup> worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?” <sup>38</sup> And he said to them, “How many loaves have you? Go and see.” When they had found out, they said, “Five, and two fish.” <sup>39</sup> Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. <sup>40</sup> So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. <sup>41</sup> Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. <sup>42</sup> And all ate and were filled; <sup>43</sup> and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. <sup>44</sup> Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men.

### Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

<sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures;  
he leads me beside still waters;<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>3</sup> he restores my soul.<sup>[b]</sup>  
He leads me in right paths<sup>[c]</sup>  
for his name's sake.

<sup>4</sup> Even though I walk through the darkest valley,<sup>[d]</sup>  
I fear no evil;  
for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff—  
they comfort me.

<sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies;  
you anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.

<sup>6</sup> Surely<sup>[e]</sup> goodness and mercy<sup>[f]</sup> shall follow me  
all the days of my life,  
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord  
my whole life long.<sup>[g]</sup>

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

I'm doing interviews right now. There will be one before the 4th game of the NBA finals with channel 15. It will revolve around the OG, the original gorilla. It will revolve around the fun that everybody is in the midst

of. But as this continues, more uncovers for me of what is important. I love sports. I love watching sports. I'm a diehard U of A Wildcat fan. Sorry to some of you! Bear Down for others! But there is so much more that flows in the cells of my body from my childhood to this day that is not purple or orange.

I lived and died Phoenix Suns basketball when I was a child. It got me through some of the more difficult and dark times of my childhood because I had something to look forward to. I see that happening again in people's lives, especially post COVID. While I'm happy for the team and the fans, there is a big part of me that is an observer of what is going on. If I were to title this message something different It would be "What does it matter if we gain the world championship but lose our soul." But that would be too cheesy and opportunistic.

My heart goes out to some athletes and celebrities. If in the middle of the game Jesus would take them aside, what might he say? He might say, "The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want." In the middle of an NBA championship final? What a buzz kill!

*The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want.*

What Lords over us? Is it to win so badly that something inside dies if we lose? The need to win affects the soul for some and when the dust clears, questions arise, and we'll have to ask ourselves is this all worth it? When I walked away from the Suns in 1989 I did it in the face of personal questions that I would not have answers to immediately. They would unfold even to this day.

As a child I would have given anything for this moment. This NBA finals moment.

I was 11 years old as a young Suns fan when it was announced, on air, that Bob Vache, the play-by-play announcer I listened to was killed in an auto accident and wouldn't be there that night. Rod Hundley, the color announcer, would take his place.

I remember when the Suns played Wilt Chamberlain and the Los Angeles Lakers in the playoffs. I lived and died with every game in that series. I thought we had it in the bag with a 3 games to 1 lead. Connie Hawkins was finally showing up as the goat that I believed he was. His swoop underneath Wilt behind the basket came long before Dr J's much more publicized feat. My identity as a child was wrapped in what the Suns were doing. It predates even Al McCoy. It was before Charles Barkley and Kevin Johnson brought a new generation of Suns mania.

I Remember when my idol The Hawk was traded to the Lakers and my innocence was gone. It was the day I asked myself, "they're trading people? Is that OK?! I was just a child.

My innocence was lost when I found myself receiving a paycheck from the very organization that had been my identity, my tribe. As a 23-year-old young man I watched negotiations being conducted that purely were about my monetary worth. A person, a human being, watching other people negotiate my monetary

worth and my value to the organization. You see I thought as a child, I was already a part of the organization.

The whole world watches the Phoenix Suns and their heroes.

The whole world watches. We would like to think it's just a game. But it's not! There are villains and there are heroes. There is animosity and tempers flare. There is life altering euphoria. If it's just a game, then why do people get paid millions of dollars?

For some observers called fans, all of life shifts and moves around the game right now.

I realize this is not a popular conversation to have but we're going to talk about what is important.

*“The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want”*

As I consider what lords over us as participants and observers; fans and performers. I think of one of the lines in the movie Hunger Games. Just think about that movie as we listen to prognosticators and TV analysts and people talking about who is the greatest and who should have had a foul called on him. We watch thousands of people in an arena watching this sport and watching these guys that have exercised their bodies to near death just to come to this moment. These guys that are bought and traded behind the scenes to put out the best product for the mass of willing observers. This is what it says in Hunger Games. “What must it be like, I wonder, to live in a world where food appears at the press of a button? How would I spend the hours I now commit to combing the woods for sustenance if it were so easy to come by? What do they do all day, these people in the Capitol, besides decorating their bodies and waiting around for a new shipment of tributes to rill in and die for their entertainment?” *The Lord is my shepherd not the next game. The Lord is my shepherd. Not my next addiction. The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want any other Lord.*

When the disciples saw the 5000 were hungry, Jesus took the disciples on a journey of intimacy in trusting *their Lord*. That *their Lord* has all the power that is needed. Even though Jesus at the snap of his fingers could have provided the food, he did not want them to be like observers watching a cage match, wrestling with their own needs. He wanted them to take what little they had, no NBA title ring on their finger. No PhD to bring credibility. No reasonable bio for people to believe in them and to honor them. He wanted them to see they're just as valued as every performer and executive out there. “The Lord is my shepherd, and I shall not want.” No want of popularity or position or power. The Lord is my shepherd.

In this life there are participants and there are observers. As we watch these NBA finals, we see players and coaches and officials. And we see a lot see a lot of fans!

Fans. The most knowledgeable people in the world. They know the fouls that should be called and who the foul should be called on. They shout coaching instructions from the upper level. They join with others in a raucous chant of displeasure over a bad call shouting, “beg to differ, beg to differ!”. They are brilliant observers! If you listen to broadcasters before and after the game, you will hear even more brilliance. They will opine late into the evening, giving their opinions and their predictions. They too are only observers, yet their comments are often brutal and cruel. They say they're just

giving their opinions and their feedback.

Well, here's what Brené Brown says about feedback from observers.

*“If you're not in the arena also getting your ass kicked, I'm not interested in your feedback”*

In these passages it appears that the disciples are participants as they say to Jesus with great pride what they've been doing and what they've been teaching. But perhaps they aren't participants at all. Perhaps they're observers in that moment. Observers of themselves. It doesn't say that Jesus responded by giving at-a-boys and Starbucks gift cards. It says Jesus suggests that they go to a solitary place and get some rest and eat some food. That's a really good idea when one becomes satiated with their own success and drunk on applause. Take a time out. Contemplate.

When Jesus finally arrives, the crowds have followed the disciples like the Beatles. You see they had become quite the celebrities. But their followers now need something else. They're hungry. Now the disciples aren't sure what to do. Earlier it says Jesus had compassion on the thousands because they acted like they didn't have a shepherd, so he taught them. The disciples became concerned because there are thousands, and they might be hungry and want to be fed.

So, Jesus takes this opportunity to teach his followers about being participants and leaders. Getting in the mix of humanity and turn their prideful pulpits into firewood to warm the hungry broken hearts in the world. To learn the personal intimacy of participating in God's divine nature.

Good life leaders like coaches aren't concerned as much with the final outcomes or about one individual shot. They care about others, in all the aspects of their lives, both in season and off season. They're concerned for the others who they journey with. The lessons they will learn for future games and for their own individual lives. I would hope so at least. Participants aren't just the players getting all the game minutes. It's also the guys on the bench who practiced to exhaustion all year round helping to make the team better. The observers in the crowd don't see them. But coach does. Maybe that's why so many of them become great coaches.

Jesus knows the trap that comes with having many followers. Because of the wilderness, he knows the danger and allure of popularity and power. He knows the importance of taking moments in a deserted place to be reminded of our true identity.

When a player or a disciple hears the taunts or praise of the world around them, they must with great focus stare only into the eyes of their coach, their liberator.

Jesus went to a solitary place often, and you know what I think was happening in that time with his Abba father? When the throngs would follow him, and it became so overwhelming because he saw the need. Perhaps he sat before his Lord and quietly he hears the voice of God say to him with a little sarcasm and a smirk, “hey there King of kings, Mr. Messiah look at you. You're kind of a big deal huh? Jesus may have said, "ah knock it off dad!" and then God reminds Jesus, "Do you remember who you are? Remember what was declared over you about your identity? When you came up out of the

Jordan River and you heard the voice of Morgan Freeman acting like me say this is my son in whom I am well pleased? You see that's who you are and that's who you've always been. That was your first tattoo, and it was not put on the outside of your body it was put on your heart so you could never have it removed not even with your own self-loathing. Not even with your own broken heart. Not even with your own feelings of inadequacy and abandonment. In these demanding moments of thousands of fans. Surrender to who you really are. Who you always were. And then we can rest once again and participate in God's divine nature and bringing life into the world and bringing compassion to those who hurt and teachings to those who are hungry.

Then Jesus says to the disciples "Look at all those folks sitting there waiting. There waiting for you. Waiting to be served this incredible food in the middle of the desert. And you get to do it. We walked with our coach. We learned from our coach. We were disciplined by our coach and now we get on the court in the big game, and he lets us take all the credit. The Lord is my Shepherd. What a journey and what a God!

I hope that doesn't ruin watching the game because I'm going to watch it! I'm going to enjoy it, but I can't help but keep my head on straight because of my own experiences and what the cost is. The cost is, what good is it if I gain the whole world and lose my soul. I will still do the interviews. I will still give people an ear to hear their stories and a voice to share their memories. But thank God we can come to our senses and know what is important. To then give it away to others in such a way that they don't need to be one of prestige. To remind them that God sees them as the G.O.A.T as the MVP and remind them that they are as important as tomorrow night's superstars. Because that's what it means to participate in the divine nature of God.

**Amen**

# **Spirit in the Desert**

## **Opening Songs**

### **Be Still**

(London Fox Taize Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God

### **You Lord Are In This Place**

(Keith Duke)

You Lord are in 1)...this place.  
2)...my heart. 3)...my mind. 4)...my life.  
Your presence fills it.  
Your presence is peace.

## **Bible Passage**

*(A passage takes us from one place to another)*

## **Touchpoint**

*(Where God's story touches our life story)*

### **Inpoured Spirit**

(Margaret Rizza, Kevin Mayhew Ltd.)

Inpoured Spirit, deep and still.  
Love eternal, the world to fill.

## **The Meal**

### **The Lord's Prayer**

(Taize Reflections)

## **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.