



TOUCH POINT

Jesus Forbids Forbidding – TouchPoint for September 22, 2021

Mark 9:38-50 (MSG) ³⁸ John spoke up, “Teacher, we saw a man using your name to expel demons and we stopped him because he wasn’t in our group.” ³⁹⁻⁴¹ Jesus wasn’t pleased. “Don’t stop him. No one can use my name to do something good and powerful, and in the next breath slam me. If he’s not an enemy, he’s an ally. Why, anyone by just giving you a cup of water in my name is on our side. Count on it that God will no-

tice.

⁴² “On the other hand, if you give one of these simple, childlike believers a hard time, bullying or taking advantage of their simple trust, you’ll soon wish you hadn’t. You’d be better off dropped in the middle of the lake with a millstone around your neck. ⁴³⁻⁴⁸ “If your hand or your foot gets in God’s way, chop it off and throw it away. You’re better off maimed or lame and alive than the proud owner of two hands and two feet, godless in a furnace of eternal fire. And if your eye distracts you from God, pull it out and throw it away. You’re better off one-eyed and alive than exercising your twenty-twenty vision from inside the fire of hell.

⁴⁹⁻⁵⁰ “Everyone’s going through a refining fire sooner or later, but you’ll be well-preserved, protected from the eternal flames. Be preservatives yourselves. Preserve the peace.”

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

“Teacher, we saw a man casting out demons in your name, and we forbade him because he was not following us.” And Jesus said, “Do not forbid him.”

It really is ridiculous, at this point in the gospel of Mark. The disciples are still dividing people, excluding people, trying to decide who is in and who is out.

I mean, it is kind of difficult to read the gospel of Mark and not get the point that Divine grace goes beyond our boundaries, our limits and our borders. Jesus constantly crosses borders, boundaries and walls to heal and restore others, both Jews and Gentiles. It's non-stop. And as added emphasis, Mark takes it to such an extreme that even Jesus is taught by a Gentile-Syrophoenician woman that his ministry of grace, mercy and forgiveness extends beyond what he originally thought.

“Even the dogs get the crumbs that fall from the table.”

A WOMAN teaches Jesus which, if you know anything about biblical times, that's beyond... well...EVERYTHING!

Yet, here are the disciples trying to reserve healing and salvation for themselves and doing it in the name of Jesus.

Let me repeat that and let that sink in. Here are the disciples, trying to reserve healing and salvation for themselves, and doing it in the name of Jesus. The idea that Christ can be a dividing point between people is absurd when faced with the life and teachings of Jesus, not to mention his death and resurrection.

Having the Christ in your life doesn't make you right, it makes you alive, and a servant of all. Yes, you are blessed...but you are blessed TO BE A BLESSING to others. But here are the disciples, wanting to be seen

as blessed superiors in his name.

And Jesus says, *“Do not forbid him.”*

Seriously, what is it about us that takes glee in forbidding? Why is it that nothing gets our juices flowing quite like excluding others? Honestly, I actually think that for some Christians, if you took away the concept of Hell – the ultimate exclusion – they couldn't imagine why you would be Christian.

But here's the thing, exclusion is not the last or ultimate word of the Mystery, union is...communion is.

It's important to note that the word for 'hell' which we translate here is not some future place outside of this world. The word used is 'Gehenna'. Which is the name for the garbage dump outside the city walls of Jerusalem. It's where all the refuse is taken. All that is to be excluded from healthy and harmonious living is sent there. It's a place of continual fire, flies, worms and maggots. With the stench of death and decay. When Jesus speaks of 'Gehenna' his listeners know full well what he is talking about.

It is a place where all that causes exclusion in our life should be sent for exclusion. Even if it's our hands, feet, eyes or whatever.

In the New Revised Standard Version, Jesus talks about your hands, or feet, or eyes causing you to stumble. Substitute “exclude” for “stumbling” and you get the point Jesus is trying to make. If your hand causes you to exclude... or your feet ... or your eyes...

If our eyes perceive the world through the lens of separation, such as say... 'makers and takers'...pluck them out.

If our hands hold tight to being superior to others...cut them off.

If our feet cause us to step on others...cut them off, too.

And it applies, not just to our body parts, but the systems and structures of our society as well. Whatever causes us to separate ourselves from others, or separate others from ourselves, **EVEN OUR THEOLOGY**, to hell with it!!!

Because exclusion is not the last or ultimate word of the Mystery... union is.
Co-mmunion is.

Jesus' judgment falls heavily on those who, for lack of a better term, we will call the 'hell enthusiasts' of our faith. Those who feel they have an investment in making sure exclusion is ultimate and hell is occupied. Jesus seems to be saying, “Well, if you insist on excluding and hell being occupied...as you wish...enjoy the weather...it's a dry heat.”

To those who insist on excluding others and hell being occupied, Jesus seems to have the proper liturgical response, “And also with you.”

So, what Jesus seems to be saying is, “to hell with excluding.”

Which, come to think of it, is either one giant oxymoron or incredible irony, and since I'm not smart enough to figure out which, I will leave it up to you.

Oh, and by the way, Gehenna/Hell, which we like to talk so much about... Well, it just happens to be the

place where Jesus is crucified. Golgotha stands at the top of Gehenna, overlooking Gehenna. Which means in Christian imagery and metaphor, Gehenna is the home base for the redemption of the world.

Jesus, the one who is totally excluded on the cross, goes to the place of total exclusion to include all that has been excluded. You see, even exclusion gets taken up into the Mystery. Even sin, brokenness, dare we say 'hell' is included in the experience and life of the Christ. Because exclusion is not the last or ultimate word of the Mystery.... Union is... Co-munion is.

Isn't that what we mean when we say in the Apostle's creed that 'he descended into hell'?

Isn't that what St. Paul is getting at when he says Jesus 'became sin'.

Isn't that what Jesus is saying when he cries out from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you **forsaken** me?" Or in other words, "Why have you **excluded** me?"

Jesus takes on the ultimate exclusions, murder and death. And transforms them into resurrection and life. You see, even exclusion gets taken up into the Mystery and is transformed into healing and wholeness. Jesus forbids forbidding by transforming it, not excluding it.

Nothing stands outside the Christ. Nothing is outside the experience of the Christ. There is nowhere you can go where you will not be 'at-one' with the Christ.

"At-one-ment" ... atonement is complete and total... even present in exclusion.

Because exclusion is not the last or ultimate word of the Mystery, union is...

Co-munion is.

So let's not use this hell imagery to sneak exclusion back in through the back door. If the focus of this text is to steer us away from excluding, why are almost all the commentaries I read on this passage about Hell. The idea that Christ is a dividing point between people is absurd when faced with the life and teachings of Jesus, not to mention his death and resurrection. And Mark's gospel not only makes this point theologically, but geographically. Jesus traveling into gentile country. Jesus, crucified outside the city walls on the trash heap of Jerusalem... and history. Jesus, crucified on top of Gehenna/Hell.

Jesus issues harsh words for us, his disciples. That is after all, who he is talking to in our Bible passage. And if we don't think this applies to us today, we really have to look no further than this meal...

"Jesus, we saw someone re-connect-ing, re-member-ing others to you...but he wasn't following us...so we forbade him." "He didn't understand it like us...explain it like us...believe it like us...He believed in transubstantiation rather than consubstantiation...so we forbade him...invalidated him...excluded him... Aren't you proud of us for protecting you and your name and your meal?"

GOD HELP US!!!

Yes, we gather as a small group at the altar here every Wednesday. There is only a dozen or so of us on a good day. But if we think the circle of Divine grace is limited only to us and our small circle, then we are to be most pitied. The phrase "Closed Communion" is so far outside the realm of Jesus life and teachings as to be laughable... if it wasn't so sad and pathetic.

And the phrase "Open Communion" isn't much better. We don't practice "Open Communion". In fact, we don't **practice** anything. We **participate** in 'Communion'. "Open" and 'Closed' are human made adjectives to separate us, one from another. We **participate** in 'communion'. The "re-member-ing" of us to Christ and

ALL THINGS and EVERYTHING!

Communion with those who want to be a part of us, and also with those who don't, we are still in communion with them because Christ is still in communion with them. And exclusion is not the last or ultimate word of the Mystery...Union is...Co-mmunion is.

We gather in a small circle here to be re-membered to a larger circle. The circle of Divine grace and the body of Christ. Which John writes in his gospel is that through which "ALL THINGS ARE MADE". And about whom St. Paul writes is "ABOVE ALL and IN ALL and THROUGH ALL." Or as one translation puts it, "IN AND THROUGH HIM THE UNIVERSE IS A HARMONIOUS ONENESS."

And so we gather here, every Wednesday, because we need to hear over and over again...to hear and taste and touch... over and over again... these words:

"Take and eat. Take and drink. My body and blood given for you and for ALL people."

Because exclusion is not the last or ultimate word of the Mystery, Union is...

Co-mmunion is.

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Song

Be Still

(London Fox Taize Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God.

Come Drink of Living Water

(London Fox Taize Choir)

Come drink of living water. Never thirst again.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Hallelujah

(Jeff Buckley)

I heard there was a secret cord that David played and it pleased the Lord, but you don't really care for music do you? It goes like this the fourth the fifth. The minor falls, the major lift. The fallen king composing hallelujah. Hallelujah...

Baby I've been here before, I've seen this room and I've walked this floor. I use to live alone before I knew you. I've seen your flag on the marble arch. And love is not victory march. It's cold and it's a broken hallelujah. Hallelujah...

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer

(Monastery Choir of St. John of San Francisco)

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.