



TOUCH POINT

Please answer the question...And show your work – TouchPoint for September 8, 2021

Mark 8:27-38 (MSG) ²⁷ Jesus and his disciples headed out for the villages around Caesarea Philippi. As they walked, he asked, “Who do the people say I am?” ²⁸ “Some say ‘John the Baptizer,’” they said. “Others say ‘Elijah.’ Still others say ‘one of the prophets.’” ²⁹ He then asked, “And you—what are you saying about me? Who am I?” Peter gave the answer:

“You are the Christ, the Messiah.”

³⁰⁻³² Jesus warned them to keep it quiet, not to breathe a word of it to anyone. He then began explaining things to them: “It is necessary that the Son of Man proceed to an ordeal of suffering, be tried and found guilty by the elders, high priests, and religion scholars, be killed, and after three days rise up alive.” He said this simply and clearly so they couldn’t miss it. ³²⁻³³ But Peter grabbed him in protest. Turning and seeing his disciples wavering, wondering what to believe, Jesus confronted Peter. “Peter, get out of my way! Satan, get lost! You have no idea how God works.”

³⁴⁻³⁷ Calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, “Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You’re not in the driver’s seat; I am. Don’t run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I’ll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to saving yourself, your true self. What good would it do to get everything you want and lose you, the real you? What could you ever trade your soul for?” ³⁸ “If any of you are embarrassed over me and the way I’m leading you when you get around your fickle and unfocused friends, know that you’ll be an even greater embarrassment to the Son of Man when he arrives in all the splendor of God, his Father, with an army of the holy angels.”

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

“Peter, get out of my way. Satan, get lost.”

I want to start off by focusing on one word in our passage. Not the whole passage, just one word. And we’ll see if we have time for anything more.

That one word is “Satan”. Yeah, I know, nothing like getting off on a positive first step.

Now the word ‘Satan’ is originally a Hebrew word. And in Hebrew, all words have their origination in a verb, even nouns. Nouns are called what they are because of what they do. Let me give you an example. Someone who ‘teaches’ is called a ‘teacher’. Someone who ‘acts’ is called an ‘actor’. And someone who ‘preaches’ is called... well, they’re called ‘boring’, but we call them ‘preacher’ to be nice to them.

So an ‘apple tree’ is an apple tree because it produces apples. A pear tree is a pear tree for the same reason and so on and so on...

It is the verb that defines the noun, not the other way around. Which Peter hasn’t quite figured out in this passage, but that will have to wait. In other words, if you call something an apple tree and it produces pears, you’re wrong, not the tree. Or to bring it up to present day, calling Covid a hoax, doesn’t make it a hoax.

It is the verb that defines the noun, not the other way around. The truth lies in the verb.

So the ‘verb’ behind the word ‘Satan’ is ‘accuse’. Satan means ‘the accuser’, one who accuses.

I want you to let that sink in.

I want you to think back on your religious life. The church you grew up in. I want you to think of today's TV and YouTube preachers.

Now hear me again. The one who accuses you is to be called Satan.

For the first 10 years of my life, I grew up in a church where men dressed up in long robes, you know, like God. And they got up in a pulpit, high up in the sky, you know, like God. And they proclaimed loud and clear that they were speaking for, you know, God.

And what did they spent most of their time doing in that pulpit?

ACCUSING...

Accusing me of being a sinner, a lowlife, a sad sack of sheep manure.

So you tell me, who were they?

Satan or God.

Remember, the verb defines the noun, not the other way around. The truth is in the verb.

Thank God I had pastors like Howie Wennes and Phil Gangsei in my Jr. Hi and Sr. Hi school years. Pastors who spoke and lived grace in clear and unequivocal ways.

I suppose I shouldn't be too hard on those early pastors. They weren't unique.

After all, it's the first line of the "Accepting Jesus prayer".

"Dear Jesus, I know I am a sinner."

There you go. Salvation starts with accusation, with Satan. And we've kind of perfected it in the Lutheran tradition. We call it the "Law-Gospel" dialect.

We use the law to threaten people within an inch of their spiritual lives, and then let up and pronounce gospel to make them feel better. It's like choking a person to within an inch of their life, and then stopping, and thinking they should be grateful to you for saving their life.

It is, to put it another way, theological and spiritual Munchausen-by-proxy.

No wonder people are leaving the church. They aren't finding God there. They're finding Satan. Accusation. And if, they can't find the Christ in Christianity, they will find the Christ elsewhere.

And yeah, yeah, yeah, I've heard all the talk about people needing to be humbled, brought to their knees. But let me tell you, in my life, I have been humbled and brought to my knees more through the acts of grace and kindness by others. Something I've experienced in spades over the last two weeks. Than I ever have through words of accusations and name calling directed towards me.

And it isn't limited to the church. In politics, accusing the other side of being evil, being Satan, pays off.

But here's my question, if you "ACCUSE" someone else of being Satan, what does that make you?

Remember, the verb defines the noun. Who knows, maybe I've been Satan in everything I've just said. Oh, well!

Ok, let's move off of Satan and on to Jesus.

If we look at Jesus, he doesn't spend much time accusing people. Yes, he calls Peter "Satan" in this passage. And interestingly enough, when he does accuse, he directs most of his accusations towards one specific group of people: the religious leaders, those who think they most speak for God in the world.

Don't you think that should give most of us highly religious folks some food for thought. Jesus accuses, Jesus is experienced as Satan, by those who think they are most god-like, and those who feel most qualified to distribute accusations on behalf of God.

Maybe we need to rethink our definition of God and the Christ, which is exactly what Jesus forces Peter to do in this passage.

I dare say, for most of us, God is a judge, before God is loving parent. God is an accuser, before God is a lover, a forgiver, a gracer.

But that isn't the biblical story. In Genesis, in the beginning, God's first thoughts and words to creation and humanity are not accusation. God looks at creation and says, "Wow. This is good, Very good."

And God's first words to humanity are "Be fruitful and multiply and care for the earth." Or in other words, "Have sex. Grow a garden." Or, "Make babies, build a farm." These are not words of accusation. These are words of affirmation and celebration.

And look at the gospels of Matthew and Mark. The first words spoken over Jesus are, "You are my beloved child." And the first words out of Jesus mouth are "Let it be." And, "The kingdom of God is near you." These are not words of accusation. They are good news. They are gospel.

Okay, I will admit that the first words out of Jesus mouth in Luke are kind of accusatory to his parents, "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know that I must be in my Father's house?" But hey, he was basically a teenager. Give him a break.

I guess my point is, we have to let the actions of Jesus, the actions of the Christ, define the Christ. We can't let our theologies and belief systems determine who God is. God is much bigger than that. It isn't Law/Gospel. It's Gospel/Law/Gospel.

If we're going to answer the question, "Who do you say that I am?" And by the way, just about every commentary said this is the focus. This is the big question for all of us. This is the question to determine our eternity. But what's interesting, is they all seem to want to ask that question in an accusatory way.

"WHO DO YOU SAY THAT JESUS IS?????"

Lord, have mercy.

No, if we're going to answer the question, "Who do you say that I am?" We can't be like Peter and get the noun right but the verb wrong.

We have to look at the question, "Who do you say that I am?", like a math question. If Peter had been forced to show his work in answering this question. He would have failed.

We have to show our work. It isn't enough to just get the answer right, the noun right. We've got to show our work. Who is the Christ in your life? What does the Christ do to you? How does the Christ work? And does it line up with the Jesus story?

You see, in the Jesus story, Jesus isn't the accuser, Jesus becomes the accused. He takes on all of the accusations of the world. He suffers them. He loses his life because of them. And somewhere in that dying,

life is found. Life is found outside of accusing, whether you accuse yourself or others. There is no hope in accusations. People don't come to new life through accusations. Accusations make people more entrenched in their ways. And Jesus dies to all that.

Jesus doesn't come as an accuser. Jesus becomes the accused. He simply moves past all of that, and embraces, restores and heals, all the brokenness that accusation creates. By the way, 'healing', 'reconciliation', and 'unity' are the verbs behind the name and noun for God in Aramaic.

Now one final note. As I said earlier, the focus on this passage when it gets preached is on Jesus' words, "Who do you say that I am?" And just about every sermon I've heard on this text hammers that question home. "What's your answer?" "It's your decision!!!"

But here is what I've always found interesting about this whole passage. It doesn't matter. No, seriously, it doesn't matter who the Christ is or how the Christ acts.

Look, just because Peter says Jesus is the Christ, that doesn't make Jesus the Christ. And just because Peter gets it all wrong on what it means to be the Christ, doesn't mean Jesus is going to get it wrong, too.

Who Peter thinks Jesus is doesn't determine who Jesus is! What Peter thinks the Christ should do doesn't determine what the Christ does!

You see, later on in his life, Peter will deny the Christ. Judas will betray the Christ. And the rest will run away from him.

And it doesn't matter. It just doesn't matter. Jesus won't stop being the Christ – the one who heals, who reconciles, who unites. Jesus won't stop being the 'verb' of the Christ. Jesus is the one who unites, and not just us to him, but all things... ALL THINGS to him.

"Christ is all and in all."

Or to put it another way, the Christ doesn't participate in your story. You are a participant in the Christ story.

In the night in which he was betrayed, denied, fallen asleep on and run away from, Jesus didn't stand and accuse the disciples. Instead, he turns them into participants in his story of healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

He took bread and wine and said "This is me for you. You and I are one whenever you eat and drink. And you are one with whomever you eat and drink."

This is who the Christ is...

The one who heals, who reconciles, who unites. Not just us to him, but all things... ALL THINGS to him.

You see, in the end, there is a 'YES' that is greater than our 'no'. A grace greater than our sin. And a healing, more powerful than our brokenness.

Thank God, that in the answer to the question, "Who is the Christ?" ...

Jesus showed his work.

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.