



Being Next to Jesus!?! TouchPoint for October 13, 2021

TOUCH POINT

Mark 10:35-45 (MSG) ³⁵ James and John, Zebedee's sons, came up to him. "Teacher, we have something we want you to do for us." ³⁶ "What is it? I'll see what I can do." ³⁷ "Arrange it," they said, "so that we will be awarded the highest places of honor in your glory—one of us at your right, the other at your left."

³⁸ Jesus said, "You have no idea what you're asking. Are you capable of drinking the cup I drink, of being baptized in the baptism I'm about to be plunged into?" ³⁹⁻⁴⁰ "Sure," they said. "Why not?" Jesus said, "Come to think of it, you will drink the cup I drink, and be baptized in my baptism. But as to awarding places of honor, that's not my business. There are other arrangements for that."

⁴¹⁻⁴⁵ When the other ten heard of this conversation, they lost their tempers with James and John. Jesus got them together to settle things down. "You've observed how godless rulers throw their weight around," he said, "and when people get a little power how quickly it goes to their heads. It's not going to be that way with you. Whoever wants to be great must become a servant. Whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave. That is what the Son of Man has done: He came to serve, not to be served—and then to give away his life in exchange for many who are held hostage."

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

³⁵ James and John, Zebedee's sons, came up to him. "Teacher, we have something we want you to do for us." ³⁶ "What is it? I'll see what I can do." ³⁷ "Arrange it," they said, "so that we will be awarded the highest places of honor in your glory—one of us at your right, the other at your left." Jesus said, "...as to awarding places of honor, that's not my business. There are other arrangements for that."

Ahhh, the great mystery...who will be at Jesus' right and left hand??? Who are those for whom it has been prepared???

We've been walking through the gospel of Mark this past year—actually running through it—because the word 'immediately' is one of Mark's favorite words. And I have said over and over again how much I love Mark's gospel, because it is so clear and the contrasts are so stark. Jesus teaches and leads by example and the disciples and the religious leaders just don't get it. It would be funny if it weren't so sad.

I love Mark's gospel because it is 1) short and 2) sweet and 3) to the point... and I'm two out of those three.

But I have a confession to make. I am beginning to hate Mark's gospel. I mean, I liked it at the beginning. Jesus talked about and exemplified 'inclusion' over 'exclusion' and I was OK with that. I mean, I kind of liked it. Because I'm pretty good at that. I've lived in another culture. I've done cross-cultural ministry in this country. I get it. I'm pretty good at it. I think it might put me in the running for being at his right or left hand.

But lately not so much. A few weeks ago, Mark starting talking about divorce and the hardening of one's heart and that was kind of a stab to the heart because I'm not so good at that. Or rather, I'm really good at that, divorce and hardening of the heart. And then last week Mark talked about wealth being a hindrance to entering the kingdom and well—it's painfully obvious—I am in bondage to my possessions and economic culture and cannot free myself. And I can feel those spots on Jesus' right and left slipping away from me. My grip on them isn't as tight as it used to be.

And then today, this passage:

*“Teacher...Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.”
And Jesus answered, “Whoever wishes to be great among you must be a servant to you...and a slave to all. For the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve.”*

Yikes. I've always used the kingdom for security instead of servant-hood. And I can feel those spots on Jesus' right and left slipping away from me. My grip on them isn't as tight as it used to be.

We keep thinking Jesus' death and resurrection are about our safety and security. But for Jesus, his death and resurrection don't bring us to new point of security, where we can **SIT** with Jesus, but a new point of servant-hood where we **JOURNEY** with him back into the world. It's the difference between seeing your faith as an individual endeavor or a communal one. If you see it as an individual endeavor, then security is your top issue. Because as an individual there is only me, myself, and I. If you see it as a communal endeavor, then there is us, we, and ourselves. All of us together, and I actually begin to love my neighbor as myself, not AS MUCH as myself but **AS** myself, because there is no separation between us—we are ONE!

Now in an individual world, I must secure power and authority to myself. The only way to stay safe and secure is to be lord over others. To be on top. Have all the power. And if Jesus is the way to that power and authority, I'm all for it, and he's worth sitting next to, hanging with—figuratively not literally, of course, because hanging with Jesus has a whole different meaning.

But the radical nature of Jesus death and resurrection is that he turns all this on its head, upside down. For Jesus, his death and resurrection don't bring us to a new point of security, where we can **SIT** with Jesus, but a new point of servant-hood where we **JOURNEY** with him back into the world.

You see, the kingdom of heaven is an alternative kingdom not a parallel one that depends on power and authority but just in a spiritual form, no, it's servant-hood.

We do great damage and injury to the Mystery when we describe it as ALL-POWERFUL, instead of focusing on the Christ as suffering servant, the Christ on the cross. The term ALL-POWERFUL is a term that has achieved sacred status by the church since the Constantinian captivity of 313 but you find very little in Jesus' sayings about this. Jesus' parables are not about power but a mustard seed, a loving father to a prodigal son, a woman searching for a lost coin, a shepherd searching and caring for his sheep. And Jesus beatitudes? I'm having a little trouble finding the phrase ALL-POWERFUL in them. Take a look for yourselves, maybe you can help me out with that.

These are not ALL-POWERFUL images in the least. The kingdom of heaven is an alternative kingdom, not a parallel one that depends on power and authority but just in a spiritual form. No! It's servant-hood.

“The gentiles lord it over others and are tyrants...but it shall not be so amongst you.”

What the heck??? If I can't lord my Jesus over you and make judgments about you, what good is he? Seriously, what good is Jesus if he doesn't grant me the power of righteous indignation over you? Look, I want a God who is an ALL-POWERFUL judge so I can say I'm being god-like when I judge you, lord my judgment over you.

But as I said, the kingdom of heaven is an alternative kingdom, not a parallel one that depends on power and authority but just in spiritual form. NO! It's servant-hood.

“The gentiles lord it over others and are tyrants...but it shall not be so amongst you.”

And so, the whole second half of Mark's gospel is focused on Jesus' journey to the cross.

And Jesus says this is his glory: His glory is when he is on the cross. And if you want to share in his glory, well, be careful, he might actually grant you what you wish.

And here's how you know in Mark's gospel that Jesus' glory is when he is on the cross: there are no post-resurrection stories in Mark; there are no resurrection appearances in the original ending. The guy on the cross has simply gone ahead to Galilee, to our streets and homes, to meet us there, and to start the whole process of inclusion, and the softening of our hearts, and living life as a gift rather than a possession, and to initiate a kingdom of servant-hood rather than security.

He has simply gone ahead to Galilee to start that whole process all over again in us...

...to start the whole process all over again **IN US!**

No wonder we have made the purpose of Christianity into being next to Jesus in the life to come— who wants to be with him in his earthly life? We know how that ends! But it's not about who will be on Jesus' right and Jesus' left. It's not about us being **NEXT** to Jesus. It's about Jesus being **IN** us. We want to be next to him in a future life where it's safe and secure for us. *He* wants to be inside of us where he's dangerous and free, set loose on the world. So, the solution to our problems is not in sitting with Jesus at his right and left in the life to come, but with his living in us, in a life of servant-hood and service to others, here and now.

But since individualism is the idol of our culture, we would much rather have Jesus be our personal Lord and Savior than the Savior of the **WORLD**. Because if Jesus is the Savior of the **WORLD**, instead of just being my personal Lord and Savior, then that means you are just as important to him as I am...and I am to serve you as I would myself.

But look, if you want to insist on the paradigm of being next to Jesus, being on his right or on his left, if that's the only way you can conceive it... If you're dying to know if you will be at his right or his left when he is in his glory or if you are dying to know who will be there, then I will tell you. You want to know who ends up next to him on his right and his left in his glory???

It's **TWO THIEVES!**

But don't worry, they're not next to him very long. After a few hours they are taken down and re-membered to him in his kingdom.

So don't worry, those spaces open up and you and I will have our turn, to be baptized into his baptism and drink the cup he drinks...

because if you want to be next to Jesus, you have to be next to Jesus.

Amen

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Song

Be Still

(London Fox Taize Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God.

Kyrie Eleison

(London Fox Taize Choir)

Kyrie Eleison, Christe Eleison, Kyrie Eleison
Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

In the Arms of God

(Tony Alonso, Marty Haugen, Michael Joncas)

Refrain: Come and rest in the arms of God. Leave your worry and fear. Make your home in the heart of God. God will dry every tear. For the burden you carry will fade within God's care.

Come and rest in the arms of God.

1) Gentle is God's way and humble is God's heart. God's love will light the way that leads to peace. Surely you shall see God's goodness and God's grace. Rest now in God's embrace.

Refrain

2) Do not be afraid. God heals the broken heart. Through grief and disbelief God still remains. God and God alone will be your souls true rest. Fall in the arms of God.

Refrain

3) You are not alone, for God is always near. Come place your doubt and fear within God's care. God will give you rest, and soothe your weary soul. Dwell in the heart of God.

Refrain

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer

(Choirs of Annunciation Byzantine Catholic church)

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