



TOUCH POINT

Treasured – Touchpoint for December 29, 2021

Luke 2:41-52 (NRSV) The Boy Jesus in the Temple

Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him.

After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety."

He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.

Grace and Peace to you from the mystery in whom we live and move, and have our being.

"Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you with great anxiety... But they did not understand... and His mother treasured all these things in her heart."

Finally, a Bible verse I can quote that allows me to say with a straight face that my kids were Christ-like growing up.

"Child, why have you treated us like this?"

I can't help but wonder if this wasn't James' (the brother of Jesus) favorite story about Jesus. I can't help but wonder if this wasn't James' favorite story of his brother Jesus because it was probably the only time in his life he heard his mother, Mary, say to Jesus, "Why can't you be more like your brother James?"

Though it wouldn't surprise me if that thought didn't run through her mind as she watched Jesus hanging on the Cross: "If only he had been more like James."

"Child, why have you treated us like this?" Wow! A family in conflict around the Holidays. Whoever heard of such a thing? And the HOLY FAMILY at that.

"Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you with great anxiety... But they did not understand..."

What do we do with this text? What do we do with a Jesus who is growing up? What do we do with a Jesus who is getting bigger than our expectations?

Try to tame him. Corral him. Rein him in. Limit him to our understanding.

This passage suggests that none of those are possible.

"But they did not understand..." Luke writes.

Is there some instruction here? Are there some words of wisdom here?

Is there something more to faith than understanding? With all due respect to Sts. Augustine and Anselm, did they send us off in the wrong direction when they said our goal as Christians is “Faith seeking understanding”?

I’ve had this discussion with many people over the years – some might call it an argument – about this word ‘understanding’.

As the word is used today, to say ‘I understand’ means the OPPOSITE of saying ‘I stand under.’ To say “I understand” something, actually means “I stand over it.” I make it ‘stand under’ me.

Look, if I say, “I stand under the Mystery,” that means one thing. If I say “I understand the Mystery,” that means quite another. It means I am *bigger* than the Mystery, the Mystery is *containable* within my knowledge. And in fact, to say “I understand the Mystery” is to negate it as Mystery.

And I guess that is why I use this word “Mystery” to speak of God these days. You see, the older I get, the less I actually understand about God. But that doesn’t mean I am more confused (though some may claim that about me). No. it doesn’t mean I am more confused. In fact, I am more at peace, more comfortable, more at ease about many things than I ever have been before.

No, to say that the Divine is more of a Mystery to me every day is to say that I find God to be bigger than I ever imagined. Showing up in unexpected places, through unexpected people, doing unexpected things.

Now I wasn’t always like this. I went to a Lutheran College. I spent four years after that at a Lutheran Seminary. I had more things explained to me and more understanding poured into my brain than most people.

Why, I even have a diploma that says I am a ‘Master of Divinity.’ I have MASTERED THE DIVINE. I am MASTER OF THE DIVINE.

I’m impressed! Aren’t you?

Not only did my faith **seek** understanding... it **became** understanding.

But then something happened. I think it was called... what’s the word – oh yeah – LIFE!

Suddenly, life didn’t go as I had planned, as I **understood** it should and was told it would. Illness, natural disaster, institutional and personal betrayal, job loss and divorce.

Everything I understood about life and faith got stripped away, and all that was left, is what Allen Nohre likes to call “The PRESENCE.”

Understanding got stripped away, but *connection* didn’t. What crumbled in my brain was strengthened in my heart.

Now, I won’t say I had a ‘peace that passes all understanding’... but I did experience a connection, a presence ‘that passes all understanding.’

And out of that experience a different kind of ‘faith’ was born. One I wouldn’t describe as ‘belief’ or ‘understanding’ or even ‘trust.’ For me these days, ‘faith’ is just another word for ‘connection.’ ‘Connection’ to the Mystery.

I don't know if this makes any sense, but I have a picture sent to me by a friend of my boys. It is a picture of a jazz musician and a quote of his, which reads, "I don't play to entertain, I play to heal." ... **I don't play to entertain; I play to heal.**

What if we saw our faith that way? What if we saw our faith not as something to explain, or make others understand...? What if we saw our faith not as something to believe in, understand, or even trust? What if we saw it as a way to heal – to connect – to the PRESENCE in ourselves and others?

How much of our in-house bickering that appears as nonsense to the outside world would go away?

With all due respect to Sts. Augustine and Anselm, maybe faith shouldn't be seeking anything. Maybe faith should seek just being faithful.

But if you're a Type A personality and that is too much to ask... because it asks for nothing...

Maybe Mary is once again a model here. Mary doesn't understand her son, but she does treasure her son.

"His mother treasured all these things in her heart."

And maybe that's not a bad way to put it. Not 'faith seeking understanding,' but 'faith seeking treasuring.' Treasuring the Christ in myself and others. Treasuring the Christ in myself and the world. Treasuring the Christ, the Presence of the Mystery in all things.

"I was hungry and you fed ME... I was thirsty and you gave ME drink..."

You see, the older I get, the less I actually understand, but the more I treasure.

Some of you know I spent two years in Japan right after college. The first year was pure hell. I fought against the culture and the people. I couldn't understand their reasons or their ways, no matter how hard I tried.

Finally, I gave up trying to understand them, and you know what happened? I had one of the greatest years of my life. Freed from trying to understand them, I simply lived in their culture and in their ways. I realized that I could never understand what it meant to be Japanese, and they could never understand what it meant to be an American.

But that didn't need to keep us from connecting, and trusting, and treasuring our time together. Freed from forcing them to make themselves 'understandable' to me – which is a virulent form of narcissism – (personally I hate it when people say they want to 'understand me') ... but that's another Touchpoint...

Anyway, freed from forcing the Japanese to make themselves 'understandable' to me – which is a virulent form of narcissism – we were able to treasure each other's presence, each other's gifts... each other's graces.

What a treasure it is to sit at table with people whose language, culture and ways you do not understand... and they not yours... and still connect through the breaking of bread and the sharing of drink.

What a treasure it is to be able to connect in a way that "passes all understanding."

You see, the older I get, the less I actually understand, but the more I treasure.

Actually, that isn't even correct. Yes, the older I get, the less I understand... but it isn't that I treasure more, but that I experience being treasured more.

Somehow, in this whole wide crazy mixed up world, I have come to feel the treasuring of the Mystery... who holds and treasures all of creation and all its creatures.

Somehow, in this whole wide crazy mixed up world, I have come to feel the connection of the Mystery... who holds and is connected to all of creation and all its creatures.

Perhaps that is why this meal is so important to me. In the night in which he was betrayed... the Christ – who was treasured by no one this night – took bread and wine and said to his disciples... “You are my treasure... This is my body and blood given and shed because I treasure you and ALL PEOPLE.”

Here in this meal I experience a Jesus who is all grown up... who has grown bigger than my expectations and understanding... who treasures the untreasurable, forgives the unforgiveable, and loves the unlovable.

I may not be able to understand it...

But what a treasure it is to be treasured by the Mystery!

Amen.