



Cliff Hanger – Touchpoint for January 26, 2022

Luke 4:14-30 (NRSV) When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” He said to them, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Doctor, cure yourself!’ And you will say, ‘Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.’” And he said, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown. But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.” When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage.

They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

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

“They got up, drove him out of town, and led him up to the brow of a hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff.”

Why do I get the feeling this ‘Touchpoint’ isn’t going to end well? Sometimes I wonder about the people who came up with the Sunday readings, the Sunday ‘Common Lectionary’. Do they not like clergy? Did they not like their pastor?

“They got up, drove him out of town ... so that they might hurl him off the cliff.”

What am I supposed to do with this passage? How do I make it acceptable and self-affirming for you? How do I tame it and make it possible for you to stand up and sing, “Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee” after hearing this? Or should I even try?

Jesus gets up and reads from the scroll of Isaiah.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has appointed me to bring good news to the poor... proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind and to let the oppressed go free.”

And then he says, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your midst.”

Now at first the people are excited. The Messiah has come to them. To their hometown. Think of all the wonderful things he is going to do for them, all the great miracles. But Jesus doesn’t and won’t. He refers to Elijah and Elisha and the miracles they performed to non-Jews, the outsiders, the supposed ‘non-chosen’ of God. This is who Jesus has come for—all those on the ‘outs.’

Now this doesn’t go over well with his hometown folks. He is to be ‘their’ Messiah... not ‘everyone’s’

Messiah.

Pastor Mark Rossman, at Living Water Lutheran Church in Scottsdale, once put it this way,

“We want Jesus to be “MY” messiah and not “OUR” messiah.”

So basically, the rest of this Touchpoint is going to be a rip-off of his idea and this theme. So, blame him for everything I’m about to say.

Now by “OUR” messiah, Pastor Mark didn’t mean the Lutheran Church or even Christianity. He meant the messiah of the world. Which kind of makes sense when you think about it. I mean, if we say there is ONE God over all, ONE God who is Lord and ruler over all, ONE God who created and sustains ALL, then why do we seek to limit God’s love, forgiveness and mercy to just a certain group of people. If God is God of ALL... then it must follow that God’s love, mercy and forgiveness—God’s grace—is for all.

So, the Messiah is not “MY” messiah, but messiah of “ALL”. But that is not always well received. Because, when privilege is your baseline, grace for all can seem to be abandonment. When privilege is your baseline, grace for all can seem like betrayal. I certainly don’t want a shepherd who is going to leave me and 98 other sheep to go find the loser who wandered off. I much prefer a limited God who works with a limited number of people, who are like me, well behaved and a part of my fold.

Look, I’m all for God loving everyone, as long as God loves me first. I’m all for God being gracious to everyone, as long as God is gracious to me first. And you know why God should be gracious to me first? Because I DESERVE IT!!! “I DESERVE GOD’S GRACE and you need to work at deserving it too.”

Don’t dwell on that statement very long. It’s not worth it.

The first century Jews were looking for a ‘MY’ messiah, one who would restore the fortunes of Israel, take Israel back to the great days of King David. A messiah who would “Make Israel Great Again.”

But a Messiah who was an “OUR” messiah, who would restore the world and all its inhabitants, who would care about the poor, the oppressed and the captive, beyond their borders...

“No thank you,” that is not what they wanted.

Now it would be easy to mock those first century Jews for their limited understanding. After all, we 21st century American Christians are so much more advanced and enlightened spiritually. Yet, as Richard Rohr points out:

“God’s major problem in liberating humanity has become apparent to me as I consider the undying recurrence of *hatred of the other*, century after century, in culture after culture and religion after religion.

Can you think of an era or nation or culture that did not oppose *otherness*? I doubt there has ever been such a sustained group. There have been enlightened individuals, thank God, but seldom established groups—not even in churches, I’m sorry to say.”

So how do you want me to speak about this passage today? How do you want me to talk about the poor and not offend your sense of capitalism and free enterprise?

How do you want me to speak about this passage today? How do you want me to talk about the oppressed and the captive and not speak of those we have walled off or put in detention camps?

I’m dead serious! How do you want me to speak of this passage and ‘OUR’ messiah, the messiah of all,

without you wanting to throw me off of a cliff? And if I could speak of the Messiah in such a way that wouldn't offend you, would it be the messiah we have in Jesus?

Let's face it. We don't want a messiah of 'all'—a God of 'all.' We don't want a messiah, a God, who will come first and foremost to the poor and hurting of the world.

We want a 'limited God' who will come to us individually, or me personally. We want a 'limited God' of me, myself and I. We don't want a God of "all." We want a "Clapper God". Someone we can 'clap on' and 'clap off.' Someone who will be there when we want, doing what we want... and then go away.

I remember reading a book on preaching many years ago. I believe the author was Fred Craddock, but I may be mistaken. And he wrote something to this effect, "When you look at a text, you need to figure out what it is about the passage that would make people want to crucify Jesus for what he is saying or doing. If you don't, you're missing a great deal of the point. After all, everything Jesus said and did led to his crucifixion."

What a different way to read scripture. Not looking to limit the story to simply affirm who I am and how I think, but push me to look beyond myself and my borders, both personal and societal.

"They got up, drove him out of town... so that they might hurl him off the cliff."

Fortunately, this is not the end of this passage or the story of Jesus. No, it ends with, *"But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way."*

Here is the 'good news.' They couldn't stop or limit Jesus and neither can we. Jesus is going to continue **ON** his way and **IN** his way. They couldn't stop or limit him in this passage and they couldn't stop or limit him later. Even when they captured him and nailed him to a cross he didn't stop being **ON** his way or being **IN** his way. From that cross he didn't limit forgiveness, but pronounced forgiveness to those of us who are held captive by the idea of a 'limited' messiah who is only 'my' messiah.

And three days later he announced 'peace' to those who had denied, betrayed and doubted him... and he told them to take that 'peace' to all the world. The world beyond their borders.

"He passed through the midst of them and went on his way."

Isn't that our hope? Isn't that our promise? That the messiah of 'all' will continue to pass in and through our midst and continue **on** and **in** his way. Forgiving, freeing, lifting up. A messiah who cannot and will not be stopped or limited. Not by us. Not by life nor death.

"They got up, drove him out of town..., so that they might hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way."

This is the story we have to tell. The story of a God who is bigger than we can imagine. The story of One who embraces more than we can embrace. One who is beyond our limits.

"They got up, drove him out of town... so that they might hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way."

This is the story we have to tell...

... a story of a God who cannot be limited to our Cliff Notes.

Amen

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taize Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God

Calm Me Lord

(Margaret Rizza)

Calm me Lord as you calmed the storm.
Still me Lord, keep me from harm.
Let all the tumult within me cease.
Enfold me Lord, in your peace.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Dwell Among Us

(Salt of the Sound)

Keep moving and living and breathing in us
Keeping working and singing and speaking through us
You dwell among us...
With all this life I long to see, more of You and less of me
Lord send Your spirit here to work in us

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer

(The Scottish Festival Singers)

Benediction

My Peace

(Keith Duke)

Peace to know, Peace to live,
Peace to show, and a peace to give.
It's a peace to share and a peace that cares.
My peace I give unto you. My peace.

