



TOUCH POINT

Give Credit Where Credit is Due – Touchpoint for February 16, 2022

Luke 6:27-38 The Message ²⁷⁻³⁰ “To you who are ready for the truth, I say this: Love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the supple moves of prayer for that person. If someone slaps you in the face, stand there and take it. If someone grabs your shirt, giftwrap your best coat and make a present of it. If someone takes unfair advantage of you, use the occasion to practice the servant life. No more payback. Live generously.

³¹⁻³⁴ “Here is a simple rule of thumb for behavior: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you; then grab the initiative and do it for them! If you only love the lovable, do you expect a pat on the back? Run-of-the-mill sinners do that. If you only help those who help you, do you expect a medal? Garden-variety sinners do that. If you only give for what you hope to get out of it, do you think that’s charity? The stingiest of pawnbrokers does that.

³⁵⁻³⁶ “I tell you, love your enemies. Help and give without expecting a return. You’ll never—I promise—regret it. Live out this God-created identity the way our Father lives toward us, generously and graciously, even when we’re at our worst. Our Father is kind; you be kind.

³⁷⁻³⁸ “Don’t pick on people, jump on their failures, criticize their faults—unless, of course, you want the same treatment. Don’t condemn those who are down; that hardness can boomerang. Be easy on people; you’ll find life a lot easier. Give away your life; you’ll find life given back, but not merely given back—given back with bonus and blessing. Giving, not getting, is the way. Generosity begets generosity.”

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

I know I read from “The Message” interpretation by Eugene Peterson for our passage today, and I did so because it is such a good one. But I am going to use the NRSV (New Revised Standard Version) translation for this Touchpoint, because I think it shows how we have used and misused this passage.

“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you... Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who abuse you.”

For Luke, the ways of the Kingdom of Heaven are different from, and opposed to, the ways of the world.

“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you... Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who abuse you.”

This passage says that the only way to end the cycle of hatred, violence and abuse in our world is to break the cycle. One does not, one cannot, end the cycle of hatred, violence and abuse by being better at it than the other person, or the other society, or the other country.

This includes ‘righteous anger’ as well. ‘Righteous anger,’ when expressed as anger, doesn’t defeat anger, but only adds to it. Think of Jesus overturning the tables in the temple. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke’s gospels, this is what leads to the crucifixion of Jesus. So, be just as wary of your righteous anger as your non-righteous anger.

Now let me go off on a little tangent here lest someone get the wrong idea. This phrase, “Pray for those who abuse you,” cannot be used to justify or encourage one who is abused to stay in an abusive

relationship. If you are in an abusive relationship, GET OUT!!! One does not stop abuse by staying in an abusive relationship and/or being abusive back. One stops abuse by getting out of an abusive relationship. And if it is possible for you to do it, pray that the abuser will find help and healing and cease the abusing of others.

What Jesus is talking about here is not a toleration of the brokenness of society, but a breaking of the cycle of brokenness. A breaking of the brokenness, if you will. Or in other words, a healing of it.

Or let me try to put it another way, and it's something I have had to tell myself quite often these days as I look at what's going on in the world and I want to lash out ... I ask myself, "Jim, do you think there is too much hatred, or not enough hatred in the world?" And my answer is, "Too much." And so I ask myself, "Then why would you want to add to it?"

So, if we are going to make a difference in society, we have to be different from society.

We don't change society by embodying the values of society. We don't change society by being better at society's values than the rest of society.

We make a difference in society by being different from society.

By the way, these words of Jesus and his living them out got him killed... In case you didn't know how the story ends.

Jesus speaks of these ways as the way of the kingdom. They are more descriptive than prescriptive. We can't turn them into new commandments... that if we just follow them, then all will be well with us.

They can't be the new way of saying, "**If** I just live this way **here** (on earth), **then** I will be able to go **there** (Heaven)."

Yes, Jesus says, "... for your reward will be great." But the line just before this is, "Don't do things expecting anything in return."

It's absurd to say to yourself, "I will do things not expecting anything in return, so I will be rewarded." That's oxymoronic. Or just moronic.

When we turn this whole passage into just another "**If here... then there,**" sentence -- "**If** I just live this way **here**, **then** I will be able to go **there**," -- then we are doing exactly what Jesus says not to do.

"If you love those who love you, what credit is that?" "If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that?" "If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that? Even sinners lend to sinners."

Substitute the word 'God' for the word 'those' and it's still the same.

If the only reason you love God is because you think God "is a good deal," you've missed the point. You would think that would be obvious by the fact that the primary symbol of our faith is a cross. Even Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane asked the Father if there wasn't another deal on the table. "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." Jesus wasn't seeing this as a good deal.

God isn't a good deal. God just is.

And what God is ... is love, forgiveness, and mercy. Which at times is a great experience of healing and wholeness, but at other times can leave you run over by the world, crucified by the world.

“If... then” sentences are not a part of the kingdom of Heaven, whether they are lived out in our relation to others or God...

...or God’s relationship to us.

Look, if God only loves those who love God back, how is God any different from the sinners Jesus condemns in this passage.

The destructive “If... then” ways of the world are not made holy by spiritualizing them.

And finally, the words, “Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned,” are not ways to sneak an “If... then” world in through the back door. They are simply a way to say that judgment and condemnation are not at the heart of the kingdom of heaven.

“Forgive, and you will be forgiven” is not putting a new contingency on the Mystery’s forgiveness. If forgiveness requires a pre-existing contingency, it is not forgiveness.

Look, if these are the new commandments of the Kingdom... if this is the new “If you behave **here**... then you can get **there**” by which God operates... then I am done. I am finished. I may as well call it quits cuz I got no hope.

The pain of reading these words is that they hold a mirror up to my life and I am a miserable failure. And it doesn’t matter one bit if I am a little bit better at these things than some others. God is not a giant bear who is chasing us and all I have to be is a little faster, a little better than whomever I am with.

No, it’s not about getting from here to there. It’s about living the ‘there’ (the Kingdom of Heaven) here. It’s not what we need to do to get to the Kingdom of Heaven. It’s how does one live and participate in the Kingdom of Heaven ‘Here and Now.’ It’s not about getting from here to there. It’s about living in the ‘there’ ... here and now. Is that making any sense?

Perhaps John’s gospel says it best when Jesus instructs us to “Abide in my love.” This is Luke’s description of ‘abiding in love.’ This is what it looks like to “abide in love.”

It isn’t a prerequisite for getting into the Kingdom, it’s a description of living in the Kingdom.

When I look at this passage and see it as prescriptive, I got no hope.

But if it is descriptive, then I find my healing and wholeness in this...

“For the Most High is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.”

Because in comparison to those on this list who turn the other cheek and give to everyone who begs, ‘ungrateful and wicked’ would be a diplomatic way of describing me.

And the only hope for me is to experience the *“Father who is merciful... Who is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.”*

The only way for me to break my cycle of ‘ungratefulness’ and ‘wickedness’ is to encounter the One who broke that cycle by turning the other cheek... Who prayed for you and me as we abused him on the cross... Who gave without expecting anything in return... And Who ultimately did not judge and condemn us in our ungratefulness and wickedness, but prayed, “Father, forgive them” from the cross and uttered “Peace be with you” from the empty tomb.

This is my only hope. And the one I encounter in this meal.

Think of this meal ... I think, “ungrateful and wicked” would be a pretty apt description of Peter and Judas on this night. I don’t think they were exactly ‘abiding in Christ’s love’ this evening. Do you?

And yet, what does Jesus do? He is merciful to them. He is kind to them.

Even though they aren’t interested in ‘abiding in him’ this night, he chooses to ‘abide in them.’

“Take and eat. Take and drink. This is me, for you. I will abide in you.”

“If you love those who love you, what credit is that?” “If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that?”

Give credit to Jesus and the Mystery for not being like that.

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taize Choir, Remember Me)

Be Still, know that I am God

Creator Spirit, Come

(Keith Duke, Sacred Weave)

Creator Spirit, Come. Renew the face of the earth.

Kindling Spirit, Come. Enflame our waiting hearts.

Anointing Spirit, Come. Pour forth on us anew.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Come O Lord and Set Us Free

(John L. Bell, The Wild Goose Collection)

Come, O Lord and set us free. Give/Bring your people peace.

Come, O Lord and set us free. Come Lord Jesus, Come.

1. And take our guilt away. Give us your pardon Lord.
2. Free from our self-obsession. Free from each fond possession.
3. Free to affirm each other...as sister and as brother

Reshape the world you made. Let what your hand created...be always celebrated.

The Meal

Lord's Prayer

(The Scottish Festival Singers)

Benediction

A Blessing

(Margaret Rizza, Kevin Mayhew Ltd. Complete Chants Vol.1)

May the Lord bless you.

May the Lord protect you and guide you.

May His strength uphold you.

His light shine upon you.

His peace surround you.

His love enfold you.

May the Lord bless you.