



TOUCH POINT

Where God Spends Eternity – Touchpoint for April 27, 2022

John 21:1-19 (NRSV) ¹ After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. ² Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. ³ Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.” They said to him, “We will go with you.” They went out and got into the boat, but that night

they caught nothing.

⁴ Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵ Jesus said to them, “Children, you have no fish, have you?” They answered him, “No.” ⁶ He said to them, “Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. ⁷ That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. ⁸ But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

⁹ When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.” ¹¹ So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, “Who are you?” because they knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

¹⁵ When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.” ¹⁶ A second time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Tend my sheep.” ¹⁷ He said to him the third time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” And he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep. ¹⁸ Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.” ¹⁹ (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, “Follow me.”

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

“Feed my sheep... Follow me.”

We are now two weeks post Easter. And John’s gospel is giving us a look at the resurrected life. This is the third appearance of Jesus to his disciples. John gives us a glimpse into what it means to be Easter people. People of the resurrection. It’s the fulfillment of the Law and the prophets. It’s the end goal of the Christian life. It’s visible now in all its splendor and glory.

And what does it look like?

“Feed my sheep.” And to quote from the first appearance of Jesus just before this. *“As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”*

Apparently, following the Christ of faith isn't all that different from following the Jesus of history. Because the post-Easter Christ isn't all that different from the pre-Easter Jesus.

I mean, think about it. In the first post-Easter experience, Jesus suddenly appears to disciples who are paralyzed by fear. The second appearance is to a disciple ridden with doubt. And the third, he feeds a group of hungry followers.

Now think of pre-Easter Jesus. He suddenly appears to fearful disciples in a boat during a storm on the Sea of Galilee. He meets Mary and Martha in their doubts as he raises Lazarus from the dead. And he feeds thousands of hungry followers with a few fish and loaves of bread. Tell me, what's different?

Ah, but what about his appearance to Mary at the Garden tomb? Well, he appears as a gardener. Which only seems appropriate because so many of his stories were about mustard seeds, wheat and tares, different kinds of soil, and lilies of the field.

“Feed my sheep... Follow me.” “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

Apparently, post-Easter life isn't to be that different from pre-Easter life.

Before I get to today's passage, I want to go back to the first resurrection appearance in John's gospel, just before this.

Jesus appears to disciples who are sitting in a closed room, behind locked doors, in their own tomb of fear. Fearful and afraid – of the Jewish leaders and probably the Roman authorities. Jesus appears to them. Shows them his wounds. Breathes on them the Holy Spirit because for John, Easter and Pentecost happen on the same day.

Thomas isn't with them but arrives later. The disciples tell Thomas what they had seen, but he doesn't believe them.

A week later the disciples are again in a closed room, probably locked again, still in fear... and Thomas is with them, and Jesus appears for the second time.

Did you ever wonder why they were still in fear and hiding a week later after meeting the resurrected Lord? Shouldn't that first vision, that first appearance, have changed them? Why are they still afraid? Don't you think meeting the one who conquered death would make you less afraid of the authorities? Shouldn't that have gotten them out of their tomb of fear?

OK, maybe I'm weird, but these are the things I wonder about. And then I read today's passage and *“Feed my sheep... Follow Me.”*

Really, this is the post-Easter life? Feeding sheep? Certainly I was intended for something more glorious, more spectacular. I can't help but wonder if Peter didn't look at Jesus and think, *“This is what I get for following you all these years? This is my reward? Feeding sheep?”*

And it threw me back to the first appearance of Jesus to his disciples, and his saying to them, *“As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”*

No wonder they were still in hiding. They weren't afraid of the Jews or the Romans anymore – they were afraid of Jesus.

“As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

Uhhhhhh ... “No thank you, Jesus. We saw how that worked out for you. How about you and the Father send us out differently. I’m pretty sure I don’t want to be sent out like the Father sent you out! You know, maybe if we just stay hidden in this room, Jesus will go away.”

But alas, Jesus meets them again. And again shows them his wounds. And again sends them out.

And this week, he tells them to “*Feed my sheep... Follow Me.*”

Really, this is the post-Easter life? Feeding sheep? Certainly I was intended for something more glorious, more spectacular.

I’ve spent my whole life trying to get to the top of the food chain, and now Jesus is telling me I am to be the one feeding others?!?

I’m sorry, but where is the grandeur, the glory, the other-worldly? Why is post-Easter so down-to-earth? Seriously, why isn’t Jesus talking about the life to come?

Well, maybe he is. You see, when we talk about the life ‘to come,’ we think it means the next life, a life away from here. But that wouldn’t be a life ‘to come,’ that would be a life ‘to go to.’

Maybe what Jesus is trying to get us to see is that the life ‘to come’ has ‘come to us.’ In Jesus, the life ‘to come’ has come to us. From Bethlehem, to Calvary, from birth to death and beyond the tomb, it lives among us here and now. It is present in our fears. It is present in our doubts. It is present in our eating and feeding one another. And it can never be taken away.

Or as St. Paul wrote, “Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.”

There is no life to go to, to be in the presence of the Divine Mystery, because the divine life has come to us. “*The kingdom of heaven is at hand. The kingdom of heaven is in your midst. The kingdom of heaven is within you.*” And Easter doesn’t change that. Easter reinforces that. Easter resurrects it even as we tried to put a stop to it on the cross.

You know, the older I get, the more I am confused about why Christianity keeps focusing on a heavenly life ‘out there,’ beyond this one. Because the more I read the gospels, the more focus I see on the heavenly life coming to me, to you, to us, in the here and now. And you would think, that as I get closer to the end of my life, I would be more interested in the after-life. But for some weird reason, I’m not. And so, to that great question that we often hear asked of us (actually, it’s an awful question which misses the whole point of the gospel), “Where are you going to spend all of eternity?” I guess my answer these days is, “Wherever God wants me to spend it.” Which is an answer that I think applies to all of us.

But that whole question is beside the point. Because you see...

The gospel isn’t asking us where we want to spend eternity,
the gospel is telling us *where God is spending eternity.*

And God is spending it with us. In life and death, in fear and doubt, in joy and sorrow. From cradle to the grave, and beyond. And so, if I spend all my time preparing for the heavenly after-life, and miss the heavenly this-life, the heavenly now-life, I’ve missed out on a lot.

Because God has already started spending eternity with me, with you, with us.

RIGHT HERE. RIGHT NOW.

I was hungry and you fed ME.

I was thirsty and you gave ME drink.

I was in prison and you visited ME.

You know, if you're not willing to spend time with THIS Jesus in this life, why would God think you would want to spend eternity with Jesus in the next life?

I mean, imagine God saying we get to spend as much time in the next life with Jesus as we spent with him in this life.

Well, that's a chilling thought!!!

Which is why God's YES of Easter is so powerful. God knows our fears and doubts. God knows how we deny and betray the Divine presence in others. God is aware of our NO's. And yet, God chooses not to run off to some other place, some other world, some next life. God plants Godself right here, in the midst of us. And God won't leave.

That's why, in John's gospel, Easter Sunday and Pentecost happen on the same day. On the first day he appears to them he says, "Receive the Holy Spirit." There is no 49 days of waiting post-Easter. There is no 10 days of waiting post-Ascension.

God just isn't going to leave us. Not for a second. Not for a day.

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Song

Be Still

(London Fox Taize Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God.

Hosanna

(Simply Taize)

Hosanna in excelsis

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Heaven Sings With Gladness

(Taize)

Heaven sings with gladness. Earth sings out rejoicing. Jesus Christ is risen from the dead.

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer

(Monastery Choir of St. John of San Francisco)

Benediction

Hallelujah

(George Frideric Handel)

Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

For the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth

The kingdom of this world is become
the kingdom of our Lord

And of His Christ, and of His Christ
And He shall reign for ever and ever

King of kings (Forever and ever Hallelujah! Hallelujah!)
And Lord of lords (Forever and ever Hallelujah! Hallelujah!)

Forever and ever
Forever and ever
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!