



Unstoppable – Touchpoint for April 6, 2022

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

Palm Sunday: *“Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. The king of Israel.”*

Good Friday: *“Crucify him. We have no king but Caesar.”*

This coming Sunday is called Palm/Passion Sunday. It wasn't always that way, if I remember correctly. When I was growing up it was just Palm Sunday. And we experienced the passion of Christ by attending Maundy Thursday and Good Friday services. But as people stopped going to church mid-week, the church made this coming Sunday a day about Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem *and* his crucifixion. I suppose it was one way to keep people from doing an end run around Good Friday.

In other words, the only way to get to the resurrection of Easter is through the crucifixion of Good Friday. You can't just jump from one fun Sunday to the next. That's not the way the story goes. If you want to identify with those screaming “Hosanna!” on Palm Sunday, you must identify with those screaming “Crucify him!” on Good Friday.

Now decades ago, I thought it was a sell-out to do it this way. But these days I'm thinking a little differently.

There is something to this day of celebrating our cheering of Jesus on one day, and then reminding ourselves that just five days later, we are clamoring for his death. And claiming, “We have no king but Caesar.”

It brings the whole picture into view. And not just a picture of our fickleness, but the whole picture of a God who will not stop forgiving. And making us whole.

This “whole” picture is important. Because that is what the words “salvation,” “saved,” and “savior” mean. They come from the Greek word “soter,” which in different forms means “wholeness” (salvation), “to be made whole” (to be saved), “the one who makes whole” (savior). It isn't just an escape from... It isn't just a rescuing to... It is a bringing together of all that is – into one complete whole.

And this fits into the word for the Divine in Aramaic, Jesus' original language. The word for the Divine is “Allaha,” which has as its essence a sense of ‘oneness.’ Not ‘oneness’ as an individual, stand alone entity. But ‘oneness’ as a unitive, holistic entity.

We keep wanting to separate things out. Our word for the Divine, “God,” comes from the German word for “Good.” And so we want to separate things out. The good from the bad. The saved from the unsaved. The believer from the unbeliever.

Our desire to separate goes back to the Garden of Eden where the serpent tempts us that we will know “good from evil.” You know, be able to separate things out. That is always our temptation. And it is our ‘original sin.’

We think separation is the end goal of the Divine, instead of making whole. And it has led us down an ugly path in our Christian history. As most of our theology and so called 'evangelism' is based on a belief in 'eternal separation,' and how to avoid it ...

Rather than a God who seeks atonement ... AT-ONE-ment ... and universal restoration, as stated in Acts 3:21.

So instead of trying to separate out these two days, Palm Sunday and Good Friday, let's see them as a unified whole. All part of the same, larger picture.

What we have then is Jesus being hailed as a conquering hero by the people at the beginning of the week ... and then they are shouting, "Crucify him!" just five days later.

What we have is a God who will embrace us in our cheers and our jeers.

What we see in these two very different days is that the 'perfection' of God is not in staying pure and holy, but the 'perfection' of God is in accepting us in our imperfection ... our fickleness ... our brokenness ... and becoming at-one with us in those things.

The fickleness of humanity is never on greater display than in this narrative...

... Neither has God's relentless and unstoppable grace, forgiveness and love ever been on greater display.

The relentless, unstoppable grace of God, even in the face of our opposition.

The relentless, unstoppable grace of God, even in the face of our denial, betrayal, the washing of our hands of him and screaming for God's death...

In the face of our relentless opposition, God's love, grace, and forgiveness show themselves to be more relentless, more unstoppable.

That is what this week is about. That is what the passion, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus is about. God will simply not stop being a loving, gracious and forgiving God. And not in some theoretical, metaphysical, mystical way. God will simply not stop being a loving, gracious and forgiving God here on earth – to us and with us.

We keep wanting to turn the passion and crucifixion of Jesus into a theory. Some kind of celestial bookkeeping. Some kind of sacrificial construct. Some kind of who knows what... all so we can get away from the fact that Jesus was doing nothing more than dying on the cross – where we put him – and pronouncing forgiveness. Making things whole.

It is time we stop our celestial game playing and theorizing, and just take a look at what happened here on earth.

Jesus comes into our world bringing the Kingdom of God. The term is a verb. The phrase "Kingdom of God" equals the 'activity of God,' or 'reign of God' is a better term. Jesus brings the activity of God, the reign of God into this world in a very specific and individual way.

Jesus brings this kingdom into our world and we say “NO.” And the reason we say ‘no’ is because this kingdom invalidates all of our kingdoms of separation. And we simply will not let anyone take away our little kingdoms from us, those little kingdoms and fiefdoms we have spent so much time and energy building.

And so we threaten Jesus with death. “Separate life our way or else.” “Separate it our way or die.” We come face to face with God, and we have the audacity to say, “Separate the world our way or else.”

And here is the Good News: Jesus says “NO” to our ways. “NO” to our rules, codes, laws, beliefs and systems. Our ways of separation. “In Christ there is no Gentile or Jew, slave or free, male or female.”

This is the good news. God will not do things our way. God will not call off mercy, love and grace just because we don't want it.

God wants to love, be gracious, *and* have mercy on *all of us*, here and now.

And for that we strip him, beat him, torture him, and crucify him. Because we don't believe everyone should have grace, love and mercy. We live under the mistaken belief that I can be made whole, separate and apart from you.

But God will not stop. Not even on the cross. In fact, it is on the cross that he makes his most profound pronouncement – “Father, forgive them...”

And when he comes back three days later, he says to those who denied and ran away from him, “Peace be with you.”

If separation is the final goal ... why forgive?

If separation is the final goal ... why pronounce peace?

Forgiveness and peace are not words of eternal separation but words of universal reconciliation and restoration.

God is, in effect, saying, “I have now forgiven you up to the point of death. I have now forgiven you in death, and I have now forgiven you on the other side of death. You cannot stop me from restoring, reconciling myself to you.”

Or, to put it another way:

Jesus does not die on the cross so that God will be merciful and forgiving. Jesus dies on the cross because God is merciful and forgiving.

We've got it backwards. We think that if Jesus isn't crucified, God won't forgive us. Somebody has to pay before God will be forgiving ... Ha! That's a laugh.

God forgives in the Old Testament – Abraham, Moses, David and many others. Jesus pronounces forgiveness to a paralytic and others before he dies. God is forgiving whether Jesus dies on the cross or not. In fact, if Jesus hadn't been crucified, he would have gone on forgiving just as he had in the previous three years.

So what does the cross have to do with forgiveness? Simply this: The cross tells us how far God will go to proclaim forgiveness, to do forgiveness. God will keep forgiving, making whole, even under penalty of death. There isn't one thing you can do to stop God from forgiving you, making you whole with all creation.

What about rejecting him? If I reject him or don't believe in him, will he still forgive me?

Oh why stop there? Let's take it further...

What if I kill him? Which I would certainly say is a form of rejection and unbelief... Will he still forgive us?

Listen to the Passion story once again:

Once in history, God took on flesh—walked on this earth—proclaiming love and forgiveness to all he met. Treating the whole of creation as belonging to his “Abba.” And we didn't just reject him. We didn't just 'not believe' in him. We killed him. We crucified him. And do you know what he said as he hung from the cross? “Father forgive them...”

Why do we think unbelief is worse than hanging him on a cross and killing him? Why do we think ‘not believing’ can stop God's grace and forgiveness? I just don't get it. Or, as St. Paul says in Romans 3:3-4, the idea that our “unfaithfulness” can stop the “faithfulness” of God is absurd.

Look at his Last Supper. Denying Jesus doesn't stop him from giving himself to Peter. Betraying Jesus doesn't stop him from giving himself to Judas. Falling asleep and running away doesn't stop Jesus from giving himself to the rest.

And our putting him on a cross doesn't stop Jesus from forgiving us, making us whole.

Are you sensing a pattern here?

God simply will not stop ...

...but it's time for me to.

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taize Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God

Create in Me

(The Concordia Choir)

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence and take not the holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation and uphold me with thy free spirit.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

See Him

(Keith Duke)

See him: 1) silent and lifeless. 2) alone and forlorn 3) broken and helpless...Crowned with a garland of thorns 4) as son and as brother 5) related to all 6) through the grief of a mother...hurting the most of all 7) as healer and teacher 8) as helper and friend 9) as prophet and preacher...

Ignore Him??? I doubt if you can.

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer

(“Our Father”, Taize Reflections)

Benediction

Gaelic Blessing/Deep Peace (John Rutter, The Cambridge Singers)

Deep peace of the running wave to you. Deep peace of the flowing air to you.

Deep peace of the quiet earth to you. Deep peace of the shining stars to you.

Deep peace of the gentle night to you. Moon and stars pour their healing light on you.

Deep peace of Christ, of Christ the light of the world to you.

Deep peace of Christ to you.