



TOUCH POINT

Outside the Camp – Touchpoint for August 24, 2022

Hebrews 13:1-16 (NRSVUE) ¹³ Let mutual affection continue. ² Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. ³ Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them, those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured. ⁴ Let marriage be held in honor by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers. ⁵ Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have, for he himself has said, “I will never leave you or forsake you.” ⁶ So we can say with confidence,

“The Lord is my helper;
I will not be afraid.
What can anyone do to me?”

⁷ Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. ⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. ⁹ Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by regulations about food, which have not benefited those who observe them. ¹⁰ We have an altar from which those who officiate in the tent have no right to eat. ¹¹ For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. ¹² Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood. ¹³ Let us then go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured. ¹⁴ For here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come. ¹⁵ Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. ¹⁶ Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

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

“Let us then go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured.”

The writer of Hebrews is speaking to Hebrew/Jewish people. He is using Jewish language and imagery. He is using the Jewish sacrificial system to interpret who the Christ is for them.

This can be very different from Paul, who is often speaking to Greeks, Romans, and Gentiles. And Paul uses their images and systems to interpret who Christ is for them. Now, that in and of itself should tell us something. The Christ cannot be restricted to one system, one mythology (and I mean that in a good way), or one religious theory.

There are as many ways to describe the Christ as there are people you describe him to. Because Christ is a verb, not a noun.

So in the latter half of the passage we just read, the writer of Hebrews compares Jesus' death to the death of animal sacrifices in the Holy Temple. He takes their religious symbolism and shows how Jesus fits into it. But he makes one important difference. The animal sacrifices took place inside the Holy Temple, reinforcing its importance. But Jesus' death takes place on the profane ground of a Roman killing field, outside the camp. Outside the city gates. Outside the Temple.

“Let us then go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured.”

And so, the whole point of Jesus’ death, from the writer’s perspective, is to blow up the whole sacrificial system once and for all. Talk of religious sacrifice should never be talked about again. That is the importance of Jesus being sacrificed (dying) outside the camp, the Temple, the Tabernacle. Sacrifice is no longer a part of our relationship with God because it never was! God never could be bought off! Nothing has ever stood between you and God – not your sin and not a sacrifice.

And the only sacrifices left to talk about are those of praise, doing good, and sharing. Now that’s a different understanding of sacrifice.

Kind of throws a wrench into that whole “Substitutionary Theory of the Atonement,” doesn’t it? We keep holding on to the sacrifice of Jesus as a holy and religious act. When in fact, it’s a profane, unholy, and political act that takes place over a trash dump... outside the camp.

Outside the Temple, the Tabernacle, the Church. OUTSIDE of all these places! It is outside of these places the world is redeemed, not inside of them.

“Let us then go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured.”

If Jesus’ death was to be a holy sacrifice within the religious system, a symbol of upholding the religious system of sacrifice, then the Sanhedrin should have held Jesus down and the High Priest should have slit his throat on the Holy Altar in the Holy Temple. Now that would have been a Holy Sacrifice! But they didn’t. They sacrificed their own religious system and beliefs by handing him over to the Roman oppressors to be crucified in a killing field over a trash dump. And that is where the world gets redeemed. Outside the city. Outside the temple.

What gets sacrificed on the altar of the cross – if we can use that imagery – is all religious sacrifices, systems and structures. They are to be sacrificed, never to be heard from again. Because in the end, our religious systems and beliefs cannot save us. Not the one Jesus grew up in, nor even the one we’ve created in his name.

Jesus didn’t come to reinforce religious systems, but to end them. And we’ve spent the last 2000 years since turning the cross into another religious belief system. When its whole point was to blow them up!

Or, to quote my friend Henry Rojas, “What if we took all the money we spend on trying to change people’s beliefs systems, and instead spent it on what Jesus asks – feeding the poor, clothing the naked, and welcoming the stranger?” Well, that would be a weird evangelism program, wouldn’t it?

This is radical stuff.

What is being redeemed... What is being saved... What is being restored...

... is not our sacred spaces of worship.

... is not our sacred piety.

... is not our sacred traditions and beliefs.

What is being redeemed, saved, and restored is the profane and unholy... the strange.

And all of that is done outside the camp of our piety, religiosity, and holy systems.

But who of us wants to go outside of our camps? Who of us wants to meet people from outside our camps? Those people are not only strangers, they are strange.

Now it is interesting that the Greek word traditionally translated into English as “hospitality” is *philoxenia*, which means, literally, “love (philo) of the strange (xenia).”

It is the exact opposite of the word *xenophobia*. And if you don’t know what the word *xenophobia* means, just watch cable news.

Love of the strange... going outside the camp... they are all part and parcel of the same. You see, if Christ dies outside the camp – if that is where restoration, healing, and death and resurrection occur – then that is where we should be. Because we belong to him, this is where we belong. Outside the camp.

“Let us then go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured.”

This is where we belong, welcoming the stranger. Who knows, it might be an angel. Heavens! It might even be the Christ.

This is where we belong, with those in prison. Who knows, we might even discover our own bondage.

This is where we belong, with those who are tortured. Who knows, we might even be able to confront our own tortured souls.

Outside the camp is where the Christ lives... *I was hungry and you fed ME. I was a stranger and you welcomed ME.*

Outside the camp can be scary as Hell, but that is where Christ descended, according to our creeds.

Now, if you really want to live outside the camp, try this one on for size:

“Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have.”

Ok, I might be willing to visit the prisons and the tortured, but live a life free from the love of money? You’ve got to be kidding! Society tells me to be a consumer. And the more I consume the better. That’s a weird word, isn’t it? **“Consumer.”** I am a CONSUMER. I’m not a participant. I’m not a partaker. I’m not a part of anything.

NOOOO... I’m a consumer. I consume. I swallow up everything and everyone. “Here I come to CONSUME.”

I’m sorry, but that is just sick. What a twisted way to look at ourselves in relationship to the world – as a consumer.

The world exists for your consumption? Remind me not to get too close to you.

So, what a strange way to live... free from the love of money. Is that even possible?

I was reminded of this from something my youngest son, Tylor, wrote when he lived in Cambodia. He went to Cambodia to teach English, and it is a far cry from where he grew up in Coronado, California, right next to San Diego. And here is what he wrote:

Out here... simplicity feels like extravagance...

Capitalism and consumerism love to shove things down your throat, tell you that you need more, the next big thing... and before anybody else gets it too. Now. Now. Now. Never settle. Happiness means being better than, having more than. And for those who accrue enough capital, you can get these things, constantly, and still feel empty. "Maybe I didn't get enough, keep going."

STOP. Step aside. Slow down. Sit down. BREATHE. Smell. Listen. Think. BREATHE. Taste. Touch. BREATHE. Life moves slower here. Breaks are taken. Blessings counted... then recounted. Rain isn't cumbersome, it's a reprieve from the heat. A friend without money isn't a drag, it's an opportunity to share what you've got. Bugs aren't a nuisance, they're food when the \$100 a month you make didn't cover it all this time.

But smiles all around nonetheless, so many smiles you could drown in them. Because they know, things could be much worse. Because this is the place where raindrops on a hot day feel the same as a rooftop infinity pool... where a friend buying you a beer is as good as owning the bar... and a deep-fried spider might as well be caviar...

This is a place... where simplicity feels like extravagance.

I had only two thoughts after I read this. One: That apple fell far, far away from **this** tree. And two: I hope he never comes back from that place. And "No," I'm not speaking geographically.

Who knows what is outside of our camps? Religious, political and cultural. What strange people and worlds exist? But here is what we do know. The Christ is there because that is where he lived (can anything good come out of Nazareth?) and that is where he died (outside the city gates). And maybe we might even meet an angel or two out there.

Look, Jesus gets crucified outside the city gates, outside the camp, because of his love for the strange, *philoxenia*.

And if Jesus is the same yesterday and today and forever, then that must mean he still loves the strange... yesterday, today, and forever.

Which, when you think about it, is our only hope. Because if God doesn't love the strange, then really, what hope is there for me... or for that matter... you?

You know why I should welcome the stranger – because I'm strange. You know why you should welcome the stranger – because you're strange.

You know why God welcomes the stranger – because God is strange. After all, we didn't crucify him because we thought he was TOO NORMAL!

And look at this meal – how strange is this? Bread and wine become body and blood and we are remembered. Deniers and betrayers become an integral part of salvation and healing and wholeness. Jesus is poured out while we are drinking in. How strange!

I think the Hebrew writer got it wrong. Jesus isn't the **SAME**, yesterday and today and forever.

Jesus is the **STRANGE**, yesterday, today and forever.

Or maybe he's the **STRANGER**, yesterday, today and forever.

Either way, I can't imagine what a long strange trip it's been for him... and will be for us as well.

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taize Choir, Remember Me)

Be Still, know that I am God

Hearken to My Voice

(London Fox Taize Choir)

Hearken to my voice, O Lord when I call. Have mercy on me and answer me.
You speak in my heart, and say, "Seek my face." Your face, Lord will I seek.

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.