



WAY Better – Touchpoint for December 7, 2022

Matthew 11:2-11 (NIV) When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples³ to ask him, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?”

TOUCH POINT

⁴ Jesus replied, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵ The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. ⁶ Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.”

⁷ As John’s disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? ⁸ If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings’ palaces. ⁹ Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰ This is the one about whom it is written:

“I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way before you.’

¹¹ “Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”

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

“Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?”

We are always looking for something. Something better, something more.

We are always looking for something. Something we can hold on to.

That something that will stop our searching, our seeking, our looking.

We are always looking for the answer. The answer that will validate our beliefs and justify why we are the way we are. The answer we can hold on to. The answer that nails it down. Finalizes it. Shuts the door. The answer that will finally stop our questions.

John is looking. John is questioning. All from the cell of a prison.

Jesus, are you the one the world has been searching for?

Are you the one who can stop our looking?

Jesus, are you the answer?

Are you the one who will stop all our questions?

Are you the one we can hold on to?

It is a direct question!

One thing you can say about John the Baptist is that he wasn't subtle. He lived in the wilderness around the Dead Sea. He subsisted on a starvation diet. When he preached it was fire and brimstone every time. The Kingdom was coming and if you didn't shape up, God would cut you down like an elm tree with blight. God had a pitchfork, and “Let the winnowing begin!”

When John first met Jesus he recognized him immediately. John saw in Jesus something new. But apparently John had second thoughts later on. It's understandable, you know.

Where John preached God as an iron-fisted dispenser of justice – “Here comes the judge,” Jesus preached a forgiving and loving God, a host of a marvelous party, or a father who can't bring himself to throw his children out even when they rip him off.

Where John said people had better save their skin before it is too late, Jesus said it was God who saved their skins and it wasn't too late for even the dead.

And so John asks...

Jesus, are you the one the world has been searching for?

Are you the one who can stop our looking?

Jesus, are you the answer?

Are you the one who will stop all our questions?

Are you the one we can hold on to?

Jesus doesn't really answer John's questions. His answer is no answer at all. Which really brings up a whole new set of questions. But that is for another time.

Jesus' answer has nothing to do with himself. He doesn't even refer to himself. He doesn't say “Yes” or “No.” He doesn't even say “Look at me.” He simply refers John to look at other people. Not at him, but other people.

I am struck when I read Jesus' response, which is really no answer. No mention of himself. No pointing to himself.

And I hear echoes of Richard Rohr's comment that we find it much easier “... to worship Jesus, than to follow him.” Or another theologian whose name escapes me, who said, “We practice too much Jesus idolatry in the church.”

“Are you the one ... Jesus?”

Can we name you and claim you? Name you, claim you, and hold you so we no longer have to question, seek, or reach out beyond ourselves?

Can we nail you down, Jesus?

And while the answer to that question is “Yes,” it wasn't quite how we imagined it.

“Are you the one ... Jesus?”

And there is total silence in the face of that question. Jesus, it seems, has no desire to be the answer to a question. No desire to be a title, the final word. A noun.

Rather, Jesus is the WAY.

A WAY of seeing.

A WAY of hearing.

A WAY of walking and seeking.
And a WAY of living.

“Tell John what you hear and see. The blind see.”

John wants to stop looking, Jesus gives people a WAY to see, to look anew.

“Tell John what you hear and see. The lame walk.”

John wants to stop seeking. Jesus gives people a WAY to rise up and go seeking.”

“Tell John what you hear and see. The deaf hear.”

John wants to stop having to hear answers to anymore questions. Jesus gives people a WAY to hear anew.”

“Tell John what you hear and see. The dead are raised.”

John wants to nail down his life. Jesus raises up and sets free those who have been entombed, to a new WAY of living.

What John the Baptist is looking for is an answer from Jesus that will allow him to slap an “I Found It” bumper sticker on his camel’s butt and be done with it.

And Jesus will have none of it.

Jesus’ answer reminds me of what my friend Henry Rojas constantly tells his recovery community: “Sobriety is not the end goal. Living life fully is, without the burden of addiction.”

In the same manner, Jesus isn’t the end goal, the final answer. Living life in the WAY of Jesus is.

I can't imagine the words that came back to John were easy to hear. John had always felt he knew who God was and how God acted. And that the world had better change. In the end, it was John who ended up being changed. And the answer he received only raised more questions.

And what is true for John I believe is true for us. I wish I could nail down this text for you. I mean, that is kind of what a preacher is supposed to do. Right? But I can't.

You know, I’m not sure when ‘faith’ started getting equated to ‘certitude’ in Christian history, but it seems to me to do a disservice to the biblical story.

Because I tend to find in the biblical story a God who is not one who stops our seeking, rather God is one who seeks us out and captures us up in His seeking.

God is not one who we can grab ahold of and hold on to. God is rather the one who grabs and holds on to us.

God is not one who stops our seeking, our questioning, our looking. God is rather the one who changes our seeking, our questioning, our looking... in new ways.

So we who are lame are given a new WAY of seeking, not to finally find, but to go and discover anew.

We who are deaf are given a new WAY of questioning, not to nail down an answer, but in order to hear afresh.

We who are blind are given a new WAY of looking, not so we can finally stop looking, but so that we can see in a new light.

And we who are dead are given a new WAY of living, not to nail things down, but to venture in freedom.

This is what we pray for this Advent season. The coming of Christ to clear away our blindness, our deafness, our deadness. So that we can see, hear, and live in a new WAY.

“Are you the one who is to come?”

And Jesus’ answer to that is WAY better than anything we could imagine.

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taize Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God

Prepare the Way

(Taize)

Prepare the way of the Lord. And all the people will see the salvation of our God.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

My Soul Proclaims

(Marty Haugen)

My soul proclaims your greatness O God, and my spirit rejoices in you.

- 1) My being proclaims the greatness of God. My spirit finds joy in my savior. For you regard me in my lowliness and every age shall call me blest.
- 2) Great and mighty are you, O holy One, strong is your kindness evermore. How you favor the weak and lowly ones. Humbling the proud of heart.
- 3) You have cast down the mighty from their thrones. Raising up those of low degree. You have filled the hungry with wondrous things and sent the rich empty away.

The Meal

Our Father (The Lord's Prayer)

(The London Fox Taize Choir)

Benediction

Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel

(Salt of the Sound)

O, Come, O, Come Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel. That mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear. Rejoice, Rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee O Israel.