



TOUCH POINT

No Tums Needed – Touchpoint for April 19, 2023

Luke 24:13-35 (NRSVUE) ¹³ Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶ but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

¹⁷ And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸ Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” ¹⁹ He asked them, “What things?” They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰ and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹ But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. ²² Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³ and when they did not find his body there they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. ²⁴ Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see him.”

²⁵ Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?”

²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

²⁸ As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he vanished from their sight.

³² They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?”

³³ That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem, and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴ They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

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

“Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus...”

... And ...

“They said to each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road...?’”

The road to Emmaus story is one of my most favorite stories these days. It wasn't always this way. It always seemed like a nice story to me, but it didn't have much of an impact. I always saw it as a story about Jesus explaining, or better yet, prescribing how things needed to be to those disciples. And then a second

point about the importance of the Eucharist and seeing Christ in it. Again, it seemed to be a prescription for where we find Christ and where we see him.

But somewhere in recent years a different part of this story caught my attention, or better yet, caught me. It is the image of Jesus walking alongside the disciples. Walking alongside and having a conversation about the events of the day, and describing where God fits in, so to speak, with those events.

Somehow this image has grabbed hold of me, because it seems to be truer to my life experience, my faith journey these days, than the earlier points.

God just seems to be more like someone who walks with me, rather than someone to believe in or about. I seem to have this running conversation with God these days, describing my life experiences. And then I seem to hear back from God as God describes how I am a part of God's story. Not outside of it, but intimately involved in it. It isn't a literal dialogue. It's more like the ebb and flow of living and moving and having my being.

I don't know if it makes any sense, but my faith journey these days seems to be much more descriptive rather than prescriptive. Let me explain.

Growing up, God was more of a concept. Something or someone to believe in or believe about. It wasn't that I wasn't aware of God's presence – I was – but I saw God through the same lens I saw everything else. And that was as something I needed to figure out, solve, work through. My faith was something to be accomplished, achieved, arrived at... and the Bible and the Church and theology were all designed to prescribe how I was to get there. A prescription for proper belief, action, and thoughts. And if those things weren't going to prescribe how to get there, they at the very least would prescribe where I was to be at any point on the journey. The biblical stories would prescribe for me what I should get out of life.

But things eventually changed. I'm not sure when. I don't think it happened all at once. I don't think it is even over now. But somewhere in the journey, I stopped seeing the journey of faith as something to be prescribed, and more as something to be described.

I started reflecting on my life of faith and found in the biblical writings stories that describe the same kind of experiences I was having. Stories of brokenness and healing, sin and forgiveness. And yes, even death and resurrection. These stories were no longer prescribing to me what I should experience in my life of faith. Rather they were describing what I had experienced.

It was like a whole new world opened up. The Bible, the Church, and theology were no longer a scorecard or a test of my faith journey – they were a narrative of it. A narrative not only of my faith journey, but of those who had gone before, and those I was walking with.

God wasn't a judge presiding over me, judging every step on the way. No, God was walking beside me, helping me interpret, see, and experience how God was at work in my life. Just as God has been at work in others' lives.

And yes, sometimes I am foolish and slow in getting it, seeing it, relating to it. But somehow Christ stays with me and doesn't give up on me. Walking with me stride for stride, continuing to share. And from time to time the fog is lifted, and my eyes are opened.

Like I said, I don't know when this change happened. This movement from having to get my faith 'right' to simply traveling the journey of faith with the risen Lord. This movement from prescribing for myself and others what the faith journey *should* look like, to simply describing my journey and sharing it with others as they describe their journey.

But the change has been a powerful experience.

Sitting down with others, hearing their walk of faith, their road to Emmaus story, as I share mine. Two fellow travelers sharing and describing their stories, rather than prescribing beliefs for the other. And in so doing, our eyes are opened to the ways Christ is present in our lives... and Christ is shared and recognized.

To put it another way, when I sit down with others and describe my walk of faith and hear them describe theirs, my heart burns with a sense of connection to them and God.

On the other hand, when I sit down with others and all they do is prescribe for me what I should think, believe, and feel about my faith life, I simply have heartburn.

And that's the difference between Jesus and many Christians for me – I don't need Tums when Jesus causes my heart to burn.

Moving from prescription to description. From thinking I have all the answers to sharing with others my questions and discoveries. It is a dying and rising. A death and new life.

I don't know if this fits or not, but I once had a friend who said you couldn't be Lutheran until you were 40. Up until that time you think you can figure out the world, conquer it, and bend and shape it to your will. But about the time you hit 40, you realize you are not in control. You cannot always be the subject of the sentences of your life, and your activity the verb. There are other forces at work, and sometimes you are simply the object of them. Through no fault of your own. And it can lead to doubt, incomprehension, and struggle.

And yet, perhaps there is something in those points of doubt, incomprehension and struggle that open our ears to others' stories. I am struck by these last two post-Easter gospel readings we have had. They are not stories of triumph, grandeur, and glory. Isn't that what we would expect? But no, they are stories of a God who comes to be with, walks alongside of, and shares in the doubts, confusion, and despair of his disciples.

Perhaps there is something in those points of doubt, incomprehension and struggle that open our eyes and ears to God's grace. To hearing, seeing, and experiencing things – especially God – in a new light. And our eyes are opened, and we realize God was with us the whole time.

So maybe there are a couple of options while having a mid-life crisis. One, you can go out and buy a red two-seater sports car. Or two, you can grow in your depth and experience of God's grace.

Personally, I'm hoping both are possible, but that could just be me.

But here is what I have experienced not just to be possible, but actual: That Christ is recognized and shared in the journey itself. In the doubts, incomprehension, and struggle. In the walking side by side with one another, and in sharing the questions and confusion.

The journey of faith is not about having all the right answers, for yourself or others. It's not about prescribing to yourself or others a certain way to act, believe, or feel. Who needs that? Frankly, I find having all the answers rather boring.

Jesus doesn't give a lecture in the night in which he was betrayed. He doesn't prescribe a certain way to act, believe, or feel. He simply describes what he is doing, and what is happening to them at this most profound time in their faith journey.

He is putting himself in them. He is going along with them, even as they betray, deny, doubt and struggle.

And in time their eyes will be opened, and they will see he was with them the whole time. And their hearts will burn with thanksgiving.

No Tums needed.

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Songs

Be Still

(London Fox Taizé Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God.

Spirit Divine

(Keith Duke)

Spirit of Love, enfold and teach us.

Spirit of Peace, rest deep within

Spirit of change, transform and heal us

Spirit Divine

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Healer of Our Every Ill

(Marty Haugen)

Healer of our every ill, light of each tomorrow.

Give us peace beyond our fear, and hope beyond our sorrow.

You who know our fears and sadness. Grace us with your peace and gladness.

Spirit of all comfort, fill our hearts. *Refrain*

In the pain and joy beholding, how your grace is still unfolding.

Give us all your vision God of love. *Refrain*

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer

(Taizé Reflections)

Benediction

A Celtic Blessing

(Margaret Rizza)

The guarding of the God of Life be on you, the guarding of loving Christ be on you,
the guarding of the Holy Spirit be on you, to aid and uphold you each day and night of your life.

The guarding of God, the guarding of Christ, the guarding of the Spirit be upon you.