



**TOUCH POINT**

## **Named and Claimed – Touchpoint for April 26, 2023**

**John 10:1-10 (The MSG)** <sup>1-5</sup> “Let me set this before you as plainly as I can. If a person climbs over or through the fence of a sheep pen instead of going through the gate, you know he’s up to no good—a sheep rustler! The shepherd walks right up to the gate. The gatekeeper opens the gate to him and the sheep recognize his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he gets them all out, he leads them and they follow because they are familiar with his voice. They won’t follow a stranger’s voice but will scatter because they aren’t used to the sound of it.”

<sup>6-10</sup> Jesus told this simple story, but they had no idea what he was talking about. So he tried again. “I’ll be explicit, then. I am the Gate for the sheep. All those others are up to no good—sheep stealers, every one of them. But the sheep didn’t listen to them. I am the Gate. Anyone who goes through me will be cared for—will freely go in and out, and find pasture. A thief is only there to steal and kill and destroy. I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of.”

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

*“He calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out.”*

The passage for today is one of the Good Shepherd readings about God and Jesus that we find in scripture. When I googled information on this passage, I ended up learning a great deal about 1<sup>st</sup> century shepherding. Actually more than I wanted to know. And I can guarantee, more than you want to hear me talk about.

Now Jesus is not literally a shepherd, just as I am not literally a sheep. I’m actually more of an old goat. But if I was a sheep, I certainly wouldn’t be one who wandered outside the fold. No, I more than likely would stay in the pen and look out through the gate at the young lambs frolicking in the field, and yell at them to get off my lawn and out of my pasture. Reminding them of how dangerous it is out there. You know, just sharing my years of wisdom with them. Because when I was their age, I was doing the same thing.

You see, I prefer my fold, my pen, my safe walls. Life is comfortable there. I have my favorite cable news station. My favorite political party. My favorite economic system. I have my favorite way of doing business and I have my favorite religious denomination.

And so my life is filled with my favorite tribes, and I have become a tribal person. And it has led to a life of physical, mental, and religious security.

I have, in other words, my favorite addictions... which give me comfort and control.

So when Jesus talks about leading me out, I’m not too sure that is good news. But staying in the fold doesn’t appear to be an option, either. Especially in this passage. For it’s either Jesus that leads, or a stranger, or a thief or a bandit will come and take me.

What do we do with a God who leads us? Who leads us to a new way of living, an abundant way of living. Outside of our folds, and pens, and tribes of safety and security. Outside of our old goat ways of scarcity, fear, and competition. Outside of our addictions.

My friend, Henry Rojas, likes to say there are three primary addictions in our lives:

- 1) The need to be right.
- 2) The need to be enough.
- 3) The need to be in control.

Now, think of the last three years. The coronavirus certainly took a whack at all three of those, and people did not respond well to the shattering of the illusions of those addictions.

- 1) Being right! No one knew what was the right thing to do anymore. At my age and health condition, was even going to the grocery store right?
- 2) Being enough! We were certainly at the mercy of the virus and the help of other people to get through it. I was not enough on my own.
- 3) Being in control! Do I even need to comment on this?

And so we were being pushed right out of our comfort zones and our addictions, and it was not much fun. We felt alone and isolated, and many people simply chose to deny the new reality rather than give up those addictions.

And while it may be true that we were being pushed out of our comfort zone these last few years, it didn't mean we are also not being led. And that's why it's important to remember the first part of this passage:

*“He calls his own sheep by name ...”*

There is one who is leading us in our journey, and he calls us by name. Not by group. Not by ideology. Not by tribe.

But by **NAME**.

You see, there is something in a name. There is history. There is a past, a present and a future. There is individuality and community. There are family names, given names, nicknames.

There is something to a name that embodies a person, reveals a person, expresses a person. Mention my name to someone who knows me and you will get some kind of comment, some kind of story. Some good, some bad. Some generic. Some specific. There is something in a name.

It's like that friend we all have. Let's call him “Joe.” When someone asks you how Joe is doing, all you need to say is, “Joe is Joe,” and everyone knows what you are talking about.

There is something in a name... a history, an essence, a reality. Even if you think there shouldn't be.

Take my last name, for example. It's a made-up name. It has no family history back beyond my father. You see, my grandfather on my father's side was a bootlegger. He ran moonshine during the prohibition and when my father was born, he put a fake last name on the birth certificate: “Hanson.” My dad went by his

foster parents' name growing up, but when he went into the Navy in WWII he took or kept the name on his birth certificate.

Hanson... totally made up. But on the positive side, a good fake name to have if you are going to grow up Lutheran in the 60's and 70's.

So here's a name, pulled out of thin air. No connection to anybody or anything...

And yet, and yet...

When the Hanson clan gets together – brothers and sisters, nieces, nephews, “the cousins” as we like to say – invariably someone will tell a story of something stupid they did and end with the statement, “And I don't really know why I did that.” And within seconds someone will cry out, “Because you’re a Hanson!”

Or to put it another way... I was talking to a woman recently who told me she saw a t-shirt she wanted to buy because on it were written these words: “I opened my mouth the other day and my mom came out.”

There is something in a name... a history, an essence, a reality. It has a past. It exists in the present. And it contains a future. There is something in a name. A history, an essence, a reality.

And it is this: The Good Shepherd, Christ, calls to and leads.

It isn't just your name. It is your history, your present, your future. The good and the bad. The strong and the weak. The certitude and the doubting, even our addictions. It is all these things that the Christ knows and still calls to. Still embraces. Still leads.

The totality of you. Everything that MADE you, you. Everything that MAKES you, you. Everything that WILL make you, you.

This is who the Christ calls to. This is who Christ names. This is who Christ claims.

You know, there is a strain of Christianity that says you and I should “Name it and claim it.” It's called the prosperity gospel, and in it you basically name what you want, and claim what you want in the name of Jesus. And supposedly you will get it.

Now I don't want to get into a discussion of this “Name it and claim it” theology except to say that our bible passage for today is a kind of “Name it and claim it” gospel. Only we're not the ones doing the naming or the claiming – God is. God is calling us by name and claiming us as God's own. In the comings and goings of our lives, in the secure folds and wandering forth. We have been named and claimed by God.

There is such a thing as a “Name it and claim it” gospel that is good news, and true to the biblical message.

But here is where that pesky “subject, verb, object” thing comes in.

You see, in the “Name it and claim it” gospel that is true to the biblical message, **we** aren't the ones doing the naming. We aren't the ones doing the claiming. Instead, we are the ones being named. We are the ones being claimed.

God is the subject. God's activity is the verb. And we are the object.

And that is good news. Left to our own devices we would name and claim all kinds of things not good for us. Like Peter, Judas and the rest of the disciples, we would name and claim a better way for Jesus to go. We would name and claim what we want, not what we need. We would name and claim life through our addictions, not through our being led.

But here is the good news: God has named us and claimed us. Not the other way around. In the waters of baptism, we are called by name and claimed by God. In the giving of the bread and wine in communion, we are named and claimed as the residing place of God's presence.

There is something in a name... in your name.

A history, an essence, a reality. A past, a present, a future.

And the grace and mercy of God has named and claimed it all... to lead you to abundant life.

**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.