



**TOUCH POINT**

## Shifting Ground – Touchpoint for June 14, 2023

**Matthew 9:35-10:8 (The Message)** <sup>35-38</sup> Then Jesus made a circuit of all the towns and villages. He taught in their meeting places, reported kingdom news, and healed their diseased bodies, healed their bruised and hurt lives. When he looked out over the crowds, his heart broke. So confused and aimless they were, like sheep with no shepherd. “What a huge harvest!” he said to his disciples. “How few workers! On your knees and pray for harvest hands!”

<sup>10</sup> <sup>1-4</sup> The prayer was no sooner prayed than it was answered. Jesus called twelve of his followers and sent them into the ripe fields. He gave them power to kick out the evil spirits and to tenderly care for the bruised and hurt lives. This is the list of the twelve he sent:

Simon (they called him Peter, or “Rock”),  
Andrew, his brother,  
James, Zebedee’s son,  
John, his brother,  
Philip,  
Bartholomew,  
Thomas,  
Matthew, the tax man,  
James, son of Alphaeus,  
Thaddaeus,  
Simon, the Canaanite,  
Judas Iscariot (who later turned on him).

<sup>5-8</sup> Jesus sent his twelve harvest hands out with this charge: “Don’t begin by traveling to some far-off place to convert unbelievers. And don’t try to be dramatic by tackling some public enemy. Go to the lost, confused people right here in the neighborhood. Tell them that the kingdom is here. Bring health to the sick. Raise the dead. Touch the untouchables. Kick out the demons.

You received without payment, give without payment.

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

*“Jesus sent his twelve harvest hands out with this charge: ... Go to the lost.”*

There are so many lines in this passage that could be a jumping-off place for a Touchpoint. So many sentences or phrases that could turn into a full-on message.

Take for example: “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion.” Well, there’s an idea! Seeing crowds and having compassion on them. What relevance do you think that might have to today and the crowds we see on our border?

Or this: *“These are the names of the twelve apostles...”* First of all, how many of them can you name? Can you name all twelve? Yeah, me neither. What might that say to us who labor in obscurity in our daily walk of faith, and wonder if we make a difference? Especially in these trying times.

On top of that, the first one mentioned denied him, and the last one mentioned betrayed him. And in the middle, there is someone who worked **for** the Roman Oppressors – Matthew the tax collector, and a zealot who fought **against** them – Simon the Cananaean. What do we do with that?

On a positive note, there are two James – two Jims – on the list, so apparently, someone whose name is James is a doubly good disciple!!! Either that, or maybe we’re only half as good and so it takes two of us to make one decent disciple. I like the first interpretation better, so I’ll stick with that.

We can’t even remember all the names of the original twelve disciples, though I can probably tell you the name of every team in the NFL, NBA, and MLB. Not sure what that says about me.

And finally this: *“The kingdom is here. Bring health to the sick. Raise the dead. Touch the untouchables. Kick out the demons.”* Ok, if that’s our marching orders, how did we end up with, *“I’m here to save your soul for some far-off place in some far distant future time”*?

I mean, seriously, how do you get from **“The kingdom of heaven is HERE”** ... to ... **“This life is a test to see if you’re qualified to get into some ethereal, amorphous, gaseous location”**? A place that is neither near here, nor concerned about our worldly ills.

WHAT IS WRONG WITH US!?:

But here is the statement that hits me the hardest: *“Jesus sent his twelve harvest hands out with this charge: ... Go to the lost.”* You see, these days, I keep hearing I have to take a stand. Stand firm, stand solid. Make a stand.

**“On Christ the solid rock I stand.”** Right!?:

And it’s not that I’m against that. I don’t think being wishy-washy is the answer to our problems these days.

But Jesus, in this passage, isn’t calling me to make a stand... but take a walk. Take a walk into the pain and brokenness of the world. Take a walk with the suffering and the forsaken. Jesus is calling me to take up residence with those who are on the outs. To live where they live, to make my home in their world. And I’m not sure I want to do that. I would much prefer to read books and watch YouTube videos to make me ‘woke.’ Right where I am.

I would much rather take a stand. Right where I am. You know, at a beautiful retreat center in Carefree, Arizona. Not too far north from where I grew up as an affluent, white, male baby boomer. The grand slam of privilege in the entire history of the world. This is where I would prefer to take a stand. And not just geographically, but I would prefer to take my stand in the philosophical and ideological world that was the grounding for those places.

But in this passage, that is not what Jesus is calling his disciples to do. He is calling them to shift the ground on which they are walking. He is telling us to ...

## **“TAKE A HIKE!”**

And why? Because, if we don't shift from the ground on which we are walking, we are going to find the ground on which we are walking will shift.

Isn't that what is happening to us now? The ground on which we have been living and standing firmly has shifted. The changing of America is real for those of us who have lived in a lily white, straight culture and country.

And into this changing world, we have been given marching orders... not standing firm orders. To make our homes in, and live with, the untouchables. To call out the demons that hold them down, enslave them, and make it hard for them to breathe.

And that requires living and walking on very different ground than I am used to. Why, it might even require me to listen before I issue statements. And that flat out scares me, because the social, political, and economic ground on which I have been standing most of my life has been very, very good to me.

And so there is this other statement that frightens me just as much: *“You received without payment, give without payment.”* The statement is a gut blow to our society. This is shifting ground at its most radical. So much of our world, our society, our culture is based on payment, earning, meriting. What do we do with such a statement?

*“You received without payment, give without payment.”*

Doesn't Jesus know there is no such thing as a free lunch? Doesn't Jesus know how the world works?

We live in a market economy. A capitalistic economy. And that isn't necessarily a bad thing. One does need to work and take care of oneself and family, as well as contribute to the good of society. We do have responsibilities. The problem isn't that we have a market economy. The problem comes when we have a market society, a market culture, where we see everything in terms of market or monetary terms. Our friendships, our relationships, other people all get judged, and their value is determined by what they can produce, consume, pay for. Our politics become steeped in it. The market mindset becomes the governing ideology for all things. It is inerrant and infallible. And we begin to believe that people are made for the market, rather than the market made for people.

It even bleeds over into our theology and relationship with God. Ask most people what their interpretation of the Cross is, what their theory of atonement is, and they will say Jesus was **“paying the price for our sins.”**

Sadly, the bottom line of our society, culture, and yes even our theology is, “Someone has to pay.”

*“You received without payment, give without payment.”* This statement brings us up short. Turns us around, reorients us. Suddenly we are at a turning point, a transformation point. We are walking on new ground. Payment, merit, earned credit is not the grounding for our relationship with God, or the world. It is not the grounding for our discipleship... Grace is.

*“You received without payment, give without payment.”*

There is nothing personally to be gained by curing the sick, raising the dead, cleansing the lepers, or casting out demons. Being nice to people isn't the price you have to pay so you can get in good with God. Others are not stepping stones to save your celestial fanny.

*“You received without payment, give without payment.”*

Why cure the sick? Because they are sick. Why raise the dead? Because they are dead. And the same for the untouchables and demon possessed.

*“You received without payment, give without payment.”*

The whole sense of life as a giant transaction, with self, with others, with God, is destroyed in this statement. The ground on which I have been standing is shifted.

Now, I would much rather make my stand on statements such as these: “You get what you deserve.” “There's no such thing as a free lunch.” These types of statements free me from having to worry about you. So you're on your own. Good luck. And somehow, I stop being a sheep among wolves and start becoming a wolf myself. And I decry the weakness of the sheep, proclaiming that only the strong should survive.

*“You received without payment, give without payment.”*

Grace is funny. It is dangerous and subversive. But it is also peace-giving and freeing. Freed from having to justify ourselves, our existence, our stands... we are freed to live and serve the world. We don't have a free will. We have a freed – F R E E D – will. And we are freed to take a walk, a hike, onto and into new ground.

And so these words from the Bible passage become so important. *“You received without payment, give without payment.”* To have this word of grace and mercy spoken over one constantly. To have it instilled as the grounding of one's house, one's home, one's life. To have it be the ground on which we continually walk. The need is never-ending.

It is a constant dying and rising. Dying to the idea that I must do something, pay a price, earn my way, and so must others. Dying to that idea, and being raised up to a new way of living, a way of walking outside of the box of ‘payment living.’

I mean, if you want to live life where the only time you receive anything is as a payment... I guess you can...

But remember this meal. Only one person received a payment this evening – he got 30 pieces of silver. Not a bad evening's work. But somehow, I don't think it was ultimately satisfying. And yet even HE WAS GIVEN something without payment this evening, something far more valuable than 30 pieces of silver.

*“The body of Christ, given for you. The blood of Christ, shed for you.”*

Christ has walked into the brokenness of our world and made his home with us, bringing the Kingdom and Ground of Heaven HERE! **WITHOUT PAYMENT!**

OK, so maybe there's no such thing as a free lunch in life, but there is a free supper, and it's the Last Supper you'll ever need.

**Amen.**

# *Spirit in the Desert*

## **Opening Song**

### **Be Still**

(London Fox Taizé Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God.

### **You Lord Are In This Place**

(Keith Duke)

You Lord are in 1)...this place. 2)...my heart. 3)...my mind. 4)...my life.  
Your presence fills it. Your presence is peace.

## **Bible Passage**

*(A passage takes us from one place to another)*

## **Touchpoint**

*(Where God's story touches our life story)*

### **In the Arms of God**

(Tony Alonso, Marty Haugen, Michael Joncas)

*Refrain:* Come and rest in the arms of God. Leave your worry and fear. Make your home in the heart of God. God will dry every tear. For the burden you carry will fade within God's care.

Come and rest in the arms of God.

1) Gentle is God's way and humble is God's heart. God's love will light the way that leads to peace. Surely you shall see God's goodness and God's grace. Rest now in God's embrace.

*Refrain*

2) Do not be afraid. God heals the broken heart. Through grief and disbelief God still remains. God and God alone will be your souls true rest. Fall in the arms of God.

*Refrain*

3) You are not alone, for God is always near. Come place your doubt and fear within God's care. God will give you rest, and soothe your weary soul. Dwell in the heart of God.

*Refrain*

## **The Meal**

### **The Lord's Prayer (Our Father)**

(The Scottish Festival Singers)

## **Benediction**

### **Sevenfold Amen**

(The Emmanuel Quartet)

Amen.