



TOUCH POINT

Losing It – Touchpoint for June 21, 2023

Matthew 10:24-39 (NRSVUE) ²⁴ “A disciple is not above the teacher nor a slave above the master; ²⁵ it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

²⁶ “So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered and nothing secret that will not become known. ²⁷ What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. ²⁸ Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, fear the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰ And even the hairs of your head are all counted. ³¹ So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

³² “Everyone, therefore, who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven, ³³ but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

³⁴ “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace but a sword. ³⁵ For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, ³⁶ and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household. ³⁷ “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me, ³⁸ and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

³⁹ “Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.”

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

“Those who lose their life for my sake will find it.”

Last week, Jesus told us to “go to the lost.” This week he tells us to ‘get lost.’

Sorry, but I’m a little confused. A little lost.

Today’s passage follows on the heels of last week’s passage, where Jesus sends his disciples out into the world... to go to the lost. Now, in the verses between what we read last week and this week, Jesus begins to tell the disciples what will happen to them when they reach out to the lost. They will be brought before church councils and flogged in houses of worship. They will be brought before governors and kings and dragged into court.

His words for this week are a continuation of that. And he pushes it further. Not only will religious authorities and political authorities turn against us, but family as well.

Apparently, following Jesus is offensive... and can get you in hot water.

Who knew? I mean, yeah, the foundational symbol of our faith is a cross, but I always thought when people in the first century Roman Empire saw crosses on the side of the road... I always thought they said to themselves, "What a beautiful symbol of joy and peace!"

And that's why we made it the central symbol of our faith.

But that obviously isn't the case, and so when Jesus talks about taking up the cross in this passage, he isn't talking about a journey of sunshine and lollipops.

Yet, even in the midst of the pain and suffering, Jesus us tells us to not be afraid.

"Do not fear those who can kill the body... but fear the one who can destroy body and soul."

Now at first glance, it might appear that Jesus is replacing one fear with another. In other words, "Don't fear the little guy. Fear the big guy."

But his words immediately following this are, *"Not one sparrow will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs on your heads are all counted. So be not afraid..."*

So fear is not the driving element in our relationship with God.

Let me repeat that. "Fear is not the driving element in our relationship with God."

But how many of us were brought up with that? You know, "Sinners in the hands of an angry God." "Believe or go to Hell."

But as John's letters tell us, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out all fear." ... "And God is love."

So, simply put, fear cannot be the foundational grounding for a relationship with the Mystery. And this is what concerns the religious, political, and tribal authorities the most – people who do not fear. What power do religious authorities have, if not fear of hell, or punishment, or ex-communication? What power do politicians have, if we don't fear losing control to 'the opposition'? What power do our families, our tribes have, if we cannot fear and demonize 'those people'?

Now it can be frightful to not find one's identity in one's religion, one's politics, one's family or tribe. Who am I if I don't find my identity in them? I can feel lost. Alone. On my own. And yet, it is exactly this 'lostness' that Jesus is encouraging. This cutting the cord from these earthly connections that claim ultimate authority.

Because, you see, it is in this disconnecting that we are set free. We are freed.

And let me tell you, someone with a FREED will is much more dangerous than someone with a free will. If I meet someone with a free will, I can manipulate, influence, and pressure their decision. I can hold things out for them that I know they will be attracted to. Or I can threaten them with things that I know they will fear.

But someone whose will is FREED – now that's a different story. Freed from fear. Freed from attachments. Freed from the bondage of choice. These people are freed to go to the lost, the outcast, the god-forsaken.

These people are a danger, for they attack the religious bondage of purity. They attack the political bondage of power. They attack the tribal bondage of exclusive community.

Once one is freed from the addiction to be right – which is the addiction of religious doctrine and practice...

Once one is freed from the addiction to be enough, good enough to be accepted – which is the addiction of the tribe and family...

Once one is freed from the addiction to be in control – which is the addiction of the political...

Once one is freed from these...

One will be summoned and punished by all of them.

I mean, Jesus was convicted and executed as a common criminal. Peter and John were jailed. So was Paul. Not to mention Stephen and many early Christians who were stoned to death. And Martin Luther had a death warrant placed on him.

Let's face it. From the world's perspective...

CHRISTIANITY IS A CRIMINAL ENTERPRISE!!!

So following Jesus is offensive. It is offensive to all the structures who claim power and authority to divide us. It is offensive to all the powers and authorities that seek to control us. It is offensive and does not bring peace... but a sword. A sword brought by the authorities, to "straighten up or else."

You see, the authorities will tell you that you are lost without them. But Jesus tells you that you are finally found when you cut or sever your identity from them.

Jesus calls us to go to the lost and find our identity with the lost. *"Whoever loses their life for my sake will find it."*

And that is not what the 'powers that be' want. They want us to find our identity in them. "Are you democrat or republican? Capitalist or socialist? Are you Lutheran or Baptist? We HOLD your true identity. We GIVE you your true identity. We ARE your true identity."

It is this identification to which Jesus brings a sword. And when we try to find our identity in those things, Jesus says we will be lost. We will ultimately lose ourselves.

"Whoever tries to find their life [in those things] will lose it..."

"But whoever loses their life [from those things] ... will find it."

And now the parable of the lost sheep takes on a different and interesting perspective... where maybe we are called to leave our folds and pens of religious, political, and tribal divisions, and lose ourselves in the world of the lost, the forsaken, the forgotten. And it is there that we will be found.

It is there that the Good Shepherd will find us, in our lostness.

Maybe the one who wanders off from the security of the fold is the one who will walk right into the arms of the Good Shepherd.

Found in our lostness. What a frightening and freeing prospect.

So, maybe I should have a bumper sticker that says “I lost it,” rather than “I found it.”

And yet, it is exactly this ‘lostness’ that Jesus is calling me to lean into, to walk into, to embrace. And to embrace not only my ‘lostness,’ but embrace all the others who society has deemed ‘lost’ and ‘irredeemable.’

This is where we are promised to find ourselves. In the lostness of the world. In the embracing and walking with those who are lost.

And it is not just ourselves that we find. But we find the Christ present as well.

“I was hungry and you fed me. Thirsty and gave me drink. In prison and you visited me ... Whenever you did it to the least of these, you did it TO ME!”

So maybe it’s time for us to stop being afraid of being offensive. Maybe it’s time to take up the cross, which is not a symbol of peace and joy, but a symbol of entering into the suffering of the world... becoming one with the lost and forsaken.

Maybe it’s time to stop worrying about being offensive to the powers that be...

And so let me conclude with this quote from Howard Zinn:

Civil disobedience is not our problem. Our problem is civil obedience. Our problem is that people all over the world have obeyed the dictates of leaders ... and millions have been killed because of this obedience ... Our problem is that people are obedient all over the world in the face of poverty and starvation ... and war, and cruelty. Our problem is that people are obedient while the jails are full of petty thieves ... and the grand thieves are running the country.

Now, I know what some of you might be thinking...

“GET LOST, Jim!”

And my only response is, “Thank you. I think I will.”

“For whoever loses their life for my sake, will find it.”

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.