



TOUCH POINT

The 'I' in Team – Touchpoint for September 6, 2023

Exodus 3:1-15 (NIV) Moses and the Burning Bush

¹ Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. ³ Then Moses said, 'I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.' ⁴ When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, 'Moses, Moses!' And he said, 'Here I am.' ⁵ Then he said, 'Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.' ⁶ He said further, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

⁷ Then the Lord said, 'I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, ⁸ and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁹ The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰ So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.' ¹¹ But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?' ¹² He said, 'I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.'

¹³ But Moses said to God, 'If I come to the Israelites and say to them, "The God of your ancestors has sent me to you", and they ask me, "What is his name?" what shall I say to them?' ¹⁴ God said to Moses, 'I am who I am.'^[a] He said further, 'Thus you shall say to the Israelites, "I am has sent me to you."' ¹⁵ God also said to Moses, 'Thus you shall say to the Israelites, "The Lord,^[b] the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you":

This is my name for ever, and this my title for all generations.

Matthew 18:15-20 (NIV) Dealing With Sin in the Church

Jesus said, "If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

Grace and Peace to you from the mystery in whom we live and move, and have our being.

In 2005 I served as the Director of Christian Growth Services at Remuda Ranch treatment center in Wickenburg, Arizona. Because we were known for our evidence-based outcomes for disordered eating and were rooted in Evangelical Christianity, we received patients whose families were desperate for help, but would not send them to anything *but* a Christian facility.

I had occasion to meet with one patient who requested a one-to-one. Throughout her life she was surrounded with high expectations from church, family and herself to please family, particularly her parents, her pastor,

and her own understanding of God. Her drive to be the good Christian wife and mother became overwhelming. As with many anorexics, the inability to feel a sense of control drives them into controlling one of the things that they *can* control. Overeating or not eating at all.

As disordered eating author Geneen Roth says, and I paraphrase,

*When I don't give myself to the out-of-control nature of love, for myself, others and from God,
I will go out of control, with the very thing I can control.*

No one can lure an anorexic patient to eat using guilt, shame, encouragement, or rewards. The hyperfocus on behavior by loved ones is tormenting. It re-affirms the belief that they are a culmination of right and wrong actions leaving them emotionally and physically starving to death for intimacy, and relationship without expectations.

As the patient and I sat and talked, there seemed no way of breaking through her self-loathing and intention to get herself right with God and to get over the eating disorder to please her family. I invited her to take a walk with me. The adult facility, called Rio, sat on a hill overlooking the Wickenburg desert with lush trees. You can see nothing but desert landscape for miles. The clouds were gently floating from one direction to the other. I gave her one instruction. I said, "I want you to watch yourself walk. Look down and watch every step you take." We began walking, she with her head down. She never looked up, vulnerable, obedient soul that she was. We walked back and sat down on our Adirondacks. I said, "So tell me what you saw." And very proudly she said, "I saw every step I took. The green grass beneath my feet." And I said, "Is that it?" She said, "Yes, but that was what you told me to do right?" "Yes, but it's hard to see the beauty around you when you're watching yourself walk and following others demands isn't it?" "Yes," she said, "it is." "Perhaps that's what you've been doing; watching yourself walk and missing the life around you."

It's hard to be present in the moment when you're wanting to make sure you're doing things right, pleasing others, particularly God, whom you love deeply.

It is one of the most heartbreaking experiences to walk alongside somebody who is near emotional and physical death in their attempts to please God and others. Perhaps all the expectations put on the innocent are the stumbling blocks Jesus speaks of, not the behaviors that lead people to sin. Although, those too can be a stumbling block.

Let's look at the passages. First in Exodus we see this conversation between Moses and God. God is telling Moses (and it's a familiar story to us) to take the Israelites out of Egypt. Bring them out of the hands of their oppressors. Moses says to God, "Who am I - *who AM I*, that I should go to the king of Egypt, the most powerful, and bring the Israelites out of the hand of their oppressors? What if they ask me, what's his name? What should I say?" Then God says, "I am who I am. You shall say to the Israelites I AM has sent me to you." God says it a third time, "You shall say the I AM of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob has sent me to you, this is my name forever and this is my title, identity, memorial for all generations."

I AM in Hebrew, both in Hebrew and Greek, is translated "to be, to exist, or to become." It sounds a lot like, *in* - *In* I AM, we live and move and have our being, doesn't it? It is an incredible description of this 'I am.' If we take it literally in our world of English grammar, the tenses are completely flawed, the grammar is wrong. Or is it? Perhaps God is speaking of all eternity in this moment of 'I am.' In all that would come before and after this moment. There is no greater name for this eternal now. There is no greater authority to stand on, this holy

ground. God says in the Scriptures, 'I will be with you. I AM with you. I was with you, and I will always be with you.' 'I am' is the authority for all generations, for all of eternity in this very moment. I AM.

In Matthew the author has combined multiple verses on how our relationships are to be with each other, not how obedient we should be in the church, or how we prevent ourselves from sinning. Not watching ourselves walk for that matter, but a way of being. A way of existing. To see this moment as holy ground and the I amness of it all. This message to us is, *you belong because I AM!*

So, this message in Matthew about not being a stumbling block and restoring someone who hurt your feelings is the lead story of the shepherd and the lost sheep, the discussion about who is the greatest and how many times one should be forgiven. Relationships. Grace permeates the responses of Jesus, and his answers are about relationships even when discussing the church. He says, "If somebody has sinned against *you!*" It doesn't say sinned against *God*. It's sinned against *you!* If you're feeling bad about stuff, go to them privately if you have an issue, that you can restore the relationship. If he or she doesn't hear you, then take another one with you and if they still don't get it ask your community and theirs for help. If they still don't hear you, then treat them like Gentiles and tax collectors.

Let's keep in mind the racial tensions that existed then, between the Jewish and Gentile followers of Jesus. Perhaps he is saying if they're not getting it, perhaps they don't get the law that you are living by. They don't understand the context. A different culture. Maybe Jesus is saying, treat them as I treat them. Give them the benefit of the doubt or forgive them. They don't know what they're doing. They *don't know* what they are doing. They don't understand your laws. They are to be accepted where they are.

No wonder Jesus said, "Come as a child. Come with the innocence of wonder and awe. Don't be a stumbling block." My mom used to say as I was leaving to go with my friends, "Don't be a stumbling block." She meant don't do anything bad that might change their image of you as a Christian. Maybe Jesus meant, 'Do not ruin the innocence of those who don't know how to live by your laws and are coming to God in their own way, in their own time. As *they are*. They're going to stumble on their own as we do, but don't create an obstacle course for them with your laws. Allow yourselves to be in cahoots with the one who loves you and can release you from your life's inner and outer oppressors.'

Then it closes with "for where two or three are gathered, *In my name,*

I AM, there among them. There is an 'I' in team. In relationships.

Amen.

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taize Choir, Remember Me)
Be Still, know that I am God

Calm Me, Lord

(Margaret Rizza)

Calm me Lord as you calmed the storm.
Still me Lord, keep me from harm.
Let all the tumult within me cease.
Enfold me Lord, in your peace.

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 Haugan)

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

Lord's Prayer

(Monastery Choir of St. John of San Francisco)

Benediction

Gaelic Blessing/Deep Peace

(John Rutter, The Cambridge Singers)

Deep peace of the running wave to you.
Deep peace of the flowing air to you.
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you.
Deep peace of the shining stars to you.
Deep peace of the gentle night to you.
Moon and stars pour their healing light on you.
Deep peace of Christ, of Christ the light of the world to you.
Deep peace of Christ to you.