



Random Acts of Narcissism – Touchpoint for November 1, 2023

Psalm 43 (NRSVUE) Prayer to God in Time of Trouble

TOUCH POINT

¹Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly people;
from those who are deceitful and unjust, deliver me!

²For you are the God in whom I take refuge; why have you cast me off?

Why must I walk about mournfully because of the oppression of the enemy?

³O send out your light and your truth; let them lead me;

let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling.

⁴Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy,

and I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God.

⁵Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?

Hope in God, for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.

Matthew 23:1-12 (NRSVUE) Jesus Denounces Scribes and Pharisees

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, ²“The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’s seat; ³therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it, but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach. ⁴They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear,^[a] and lay them on the shoulders of others, but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. ⁵They do all their deeds to be seen by others, for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long. ⁶They love to have the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues ⁷and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to have people call them rabbi. ⁸But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers and sisters. ⁹And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father, the one in heaven. ¹⁰Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah.^[b] ¹¹The greatest among you will be your servant. ¹²All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.

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

I’m a little skeptical when I hear the words *new* and *improved*. Was something wrong with it before? I don’t like it when something I’ve used for years becomes old and subpar. It devalues my original choice. I think they should change the term new and improved to, ‘*You think that was good?*’ I would gladly jump on the bandwagon if I were made to feel like I was the first one on. Although that sounds odd because there would not be a bandwagon unless there were others on it already.

It’s about feeling good about oneself. I can’t tell you how many times I see new inventions or life hacks on infomercials and scream, “I thought of that first!”

Since I’m ranting, I might as well tell you I hate it when people take cuts. I only speak up when people take cuts in front of myself or others. It seems silly to yell, ‘They took cuts!’ to someone behind me. But when it happens to any of the people in front of me it becomes a “for the people” thing. It’s a cause for justice. It also satisfies the morality cop inside me. In reality it sounds like this, “Hey, um... excuse me” (adult self-righteousness voice), “We’ve all been waiting here quite a while and I don’t appreciate you taking cuts.” In truth I should just start yelling, “I wanna be first!” but that wouldn’t go over well in a crowd. We really need to be more civilized when our own narcissism brews.

I don’t like it when people are on the cell phone, and it is their turn to order. “Talk to the cashier please, they are people too, you know!” Sometimes, however, I get an important call that comes right when I’m getting a coffee. The lady behind me sighs so loud I can’t concentrate. My words stumble. “I’ll have aaaa double... double... no a tall... just a minute... double tall... non-fat... did I say double?... hold on Hazelnut... double fat, non-tall, hazelnut ... Oh I’ll have a drip!”

The other day I was crossing the crosswalk in a busy intersection and a lady turning right couldn't wait for me to fully cross. She practically clipped my baggy shorts with her fender as she was turning. Luckily, I was wearing boxers. I wonder how she explained the shorts hanging from her fender. 'Honey, I found a great sale at the new drive-thru Target.' Why do people have to cut it so close when driving? Seriously, is my death worth shaving a millionth off your trip?

This is a small glimpse of the human condition. My condition. Anybody could write the same monologue with different random acts of narcissism.

On this All Saints remembrance, do you think the saints who have gone before us were without their pet peeves? Did they ever perform random acts of narcissism? What makes a saint a saint is not their perfection but what has been declared about them, what people choose to remember about them. What God knows about them is a different story. Perhaps God does not put a positive spin on their lives. God is not ignoring their human condition rife with unregulated emotional reactions. It just might be that God experiences us without the impairment of our human condition.

God is intimate with us even when we are not. The question is, will we give ourselves, with awareness, to this intimacy? This is the awakening – a momentous spiritual experience where intimacy moves from a one-way street from God to a free-flowing, multi-directional thoroughfare. It reaches from within and without and extends to the world.

Jesus singles out those whose ambitions are to sit in the best seat at the potluck (I miss potlucks) or in the worship show. They like to be recognized in public and given sports names like Prime, King and Doctor. From a psychological perspective, this behavior doesn't just appear out of the blue. It is nurtured through years of pettiness and efforts at upward mobility. The eventual result of a life of unchecked narcissism is neuroticism. One can't be intimate with God if they act as a god. They are only intimate with themselves. It happens in the moments of a life without surrender to spiritual intimacy. A life with practices, mentors, and community. Many of these saints, both modern and those who have passed, can be our mentors.

Sainthood is not perfection. It is an intimate life in Christ that spills. It is the life that means, I am seated with Christ in the heavenly home of my heart. A welcoming place for God and others to reside.

Who are the saints in your life, both past and present? Those who have testified to God's intimacy in their lives? Those who have learned to institute the divine pause before narcissistic acts randomly insert themselves? We all have this capacity to be intimate with God and occasionally make good choices. It takes, as Dr. David Daniels says, a "non-judgmental mind and an unconditional open-heartedness."

May we embrace the human condition in ourselves and others.

May we become more and more aware of God's invitation to intimacy.

May it produce the humility that is a world-changer.

I have encountered many in recovery who believe their addiction prevents them from intimacy with God. They say their goal is to get closer to God again. My answer to sinners is the same as to addicts, as they are both the same: "You can't get any closer to God than you are. To be separate is an illusion." Our practices of awareness open us to experience what always was and is. God is always inviting us to the experience of holy mingling. What better earthly seat is there, what title, what place in line? We are seated in heavenly places!

We may not want the best seat in this competitive world, but we certainly do not want the last seat. Perhaps intimacy in Christ saved the second to the last seat for us.

Amen

Opening Songs

Be Still

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

Create in Me

(The Concordia Choir)

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from thy presence and take not the Holy Spirit from me.
Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation and uphold me with thy free spirit.

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 Haugan, 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 soul's 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

Lord's Prayer

(Robert Stone, The Cambridge Singers, John Rutter)

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.