



TOUCH POINT

## Immersed in Life – Touchpoint for January 3, 2024

### Acts 19:1-7 (NRSVUE) Paul in Ephesus

<sup>1</sup>While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the interior regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. <sup>2</sup>He said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?” They replied, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” <sup>3</sup>Then he said, “Into what, then, were you baptized?” They answered, “Into John’s baptism.” <sup>4</sup>Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus.” <sup>5</sup>On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>6</sup>When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied, <sup>7</sup>altogether there were about twelve of them.

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

I’d like to begin this first respite of 2024 with a quote from Henri Nouwen.

“We must learn to live each day, each hour, yes, each minute as a new beginning, as a unique opportunity to make everything new.

Imagine that we could live each moment as a moment pregnant with new life.

Imagine that we could live each day as a day full of promises.

Imagine that we could walk through the new year always listening to a voice saying to us:

“I have a gift for you and can’t wait for you to see it! Imagine!”

I’ve had the privilege of working with very talented clinicians as clients. The weight of responsibility that many carry can drive them to self-medication, including alcohol. The burden to keep people alive can be overwhelming and outcomes devastating.

One of my clients was a talented physician who had come to the end of her emotional self and became steeped in addiction. She took great pride in her abilities, but her inabilities were getting the best of her. Over time, it became more and more evident her expectations and empathic style made her both professionally successful and emotionally and mentally spent. The doctor thought she could just stop her prescription and alcohol use and return to work. To her, the substances were the problem. It took some time for her to realize her descent into depression and addiction was preceded by a failed attempt to prevent a patient from dying. She had experienced similar events before; however, her personal investment made this incident particularly devastating. She believed she had done everything right clinically, and was blindsided by the result. She began to numb the pain.

We discussed her own understanding of God, and I asked where her God was in all of this. She expressed that she didn't know where God was, which led her to see she was occupying a place reserved for God. It was eye-opening for her. The idea that life-and-death outcomes do not rest on her shoulders came as a shock. It produced a new perspective on her role in another person’s physical life. Like a spiritual director who serves as a midwife for birthing new life, she too, could accompany others in life work. She could become a witness as well as a participant in God's divine nature without the devastating divine responsibility.

Perhaps this is what the apostle Paul meant in Galatians 2:20 when he said, “It is not I who lives but the Spirit of Christ who lives in me,” or as it reads in *The Message*, “My ego is no longer central. It is no longer important that I appear righteous before you or have your good opinion, and I am no longer driven to impress God. Christ lives in me.”

In today's passage, the people are experiencing the baptism of the Holy Spirit. John had baptized them by immersing them in God's declaration of unconditional love. Now they're being baptized in the Holy Spirit. What does that mean? Let's not just glance over this! This is a concept pregnant with possibilities. It's the elephant in the room in denominational conversations of doctrine and theology. I've seen the topic avoided in nearly all the churches I have participated in, perhaps out of fear that it would descend into discussions about unknown languages and faith healers and anything else we simply can't control. But isn't the intrigue found in this concept of being baptized in the Holy Spirit the exact definition of mystery? Isn't living, moving and being in this Mystery what truly living is all about?

As a young kid I entered my new Christian faith by plunging into the world of charismatic curiosity and experience. I denounced it as an adult, and now as a spiritual director, I find the experience of Spirit infiltrates all of life like an ongoing immersion.

The active experience of Spirit was never more needed and evident than when I was alone in my apartment in 2020. The world had COVID and I had cancer. I was three floors up with a giant window overlooking the lush desert. Every morning I stared out over the 13th green of the Lone Mountain Golf Course. The morning serenity welcomed the groundskeepers that manicured the lush grass. I watched the slow movements of life within nature's growth and transformation, nurtured by the groundskeepers, each with a specific task. Life was being accompanied, not created. The groundskeepers were making a place for it to thrive with great vitality. I felt a surge of awareness of Holy Spirit not unlike all my different experiences.

As I stared out and watched this living metaphor, I thought about how in my suffering, Spirit was no longer separate or dormant in my life. It did not reside in my practices, and it need not be conjured up emotionally. It is ever present and stirred by my conscious awareness of its silent, life-giving power. It fascinates me that we are more comfortable talking about the force in Star Wars than the third person of the Trinity in all its power.

I would like to share an entry from my journal during this time in the apartment.

*September 29, 2020*

*I'm still trying to make sense of what it means to live the spirit of life, right now, in the flesh. Jürgen Moltmann describes it as Spirit coming to us as we are, in our flesh, not so much Spirit coming in the flesh. But coming to us in our flesh. The life we live now is life in the Spirit and the Spirit of life. Said another way, life in God and God in life. Perhaps when these two are in harmony is where we find our groove.*

*Here's an example of what I mean. We see bad things happen and we experience difficulties and challenges. We're offered opportunities. I'm feeling the fear of what this information or what this thing is going to do to me. What is this thing, this illness, going to do?*

*Now as I look out at life in the desert the question has flipped! It's about the God of life in all things! Now the question has changed from, "what is this thing going to do to me?" to, "what is God going to do in this thing?"*

*The vitality of Life in the Spirit and Spirit in Life*

*In all things!*

*As I think about life and death, I'm struggling with how we preoccupy our minds with removing suffering and the prevention of death. I mean after all, isn't it better to be absent from the body and present with the Lord? Should I feel guilty for wanting to live? God forbid! It is OK to see the beauty of*

*people who work to sustain the life of the flesh. Doctors, first responders, life nurturing counselors. Perhaps ministers ought to be encouraging followers to create a place that is inhabitable for their life regardless of their circumstances. Yes, change those circumstances when able, but to accept the things that cannot be changed! Ah! That's what that means! Not that we aren't miserable in those circumstances, but we can learn to be an agent of transformation within those circumstances. We can be an agent of transformation within those circumstances. Making this world, my world, our world a more habitable place for the wellspring of life. Perhaps all that we do in our work as stewards is to bring life and encourage life as we let go of the outcomes. Paradoxically, it is making me fear death less! But if we are living life in the Spirit!*

*How do I encourage a more habitable place to see, nurture and restore the home of my heart for the wellspring of life in spirit?*

*How does this impact my love-giving nature?*

*How does this impact my activist nature?*

*Think of our strong opinions. Do they reflect a defensive stance to protect life? Or do they nurture a safe place to encourage the vitality of life?*

This new year may we vow to live in the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the vitality love for life!

**Amen**

## Opening Songs

### **Be Still**

(The London Fox Taizé 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)*

### **Dwell Among Us**

(Salt of the Sound)

- 1) Keep moving and living and breathing in us
- 2) Keeping working and singing and speaking through us
- 3) You dwell among us...
- 4) With all this life I long to see, more of You and less of me
- 5) Lord send Your Spirit here to work in us.

### **The Meal**

#### **The Lord's Prayer**

(The Scottish Festival Singers)

### **Benediction**

#### **Sevenfold Amen**

(The Emmanuel Quartet)

Amen.