



You're Soaking In It! – Touchpoint for January 10, 2024

Psalm 139:1-5, 12-17 (NRSVUE)

TOUCH POINT

1 Lord, you have searched me out and known me; *
you know my sitting down and my rising up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.

2 You trace my journeys and my resting-places *
and are acquainted with all my ways.

3 Indeed, there is not a word on my lips, *
but you, O Lord, know it altogether.

4 You press upon me behind and before *
and lay your hand upon me.

5 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; *
it is so high that I cannot attain to it.

12 For you yourself created my inmost parts; *
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

13 I will thank you because I am marvelously made; *
your works are wonderful, and I know it well.

14 My body was not hidden from you, *
while I was being made in secret
and woven in the depths of the earth.

15 Your eyes beheld my limbs, yet unfinished in the womb;
all of them were written in your book; *
they were fashioned day by day,
when as yet there was none of them.

16 How deep I find your thoughts, O God! *
how great is the sum of them!

17 If I were to count them, they would be more in number than the sand; *
to count them all, my life span would need to be like yours.

John 1:43-51 (NRSVUE) Jesus Calls Philip and Nathanael

⁴³The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." ⁴⁴Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." ⁴⁶Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." ⁴⁷When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" ⁴⁸Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." ⁴⁹Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" ⁵⁰Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." ⁵¹And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

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

We have been reading in John 1 about the Word becoming Flesh. Jim Hanson shared his Touchpoint from last week's text, and he told me in one sentence what I was trying to convey to you in 20 minutes. It's not only that the Word became Flesh but also that the Flesh became Word. Jesus brought life wherever he was. Oh, that we would be life bringers! Speaking life-giving words, expressing life-giving laughter and divine presence to what is occurring. This way of living is referred to as being led by the Spirit.

In our Respite last week, we delved into the Hebrew and Greek understanding of Word. Professor John Paterson writes, "To a Jew, the spoken word was fearfully alive.... It was a unit of energy charged with power." The Greeks perceived Word as *Logos* or the reason of God, the mind of God. Reason being the capacity to know right from wrong.

When John speaks of Word, he is attempting to relate the Hebrew and Greek understandings together. Power, wisdom, and reason *combined*, is John's premise.

Today we read this combination in Psalm 139. The psalmist attempts to explain the ineffable nature of life in spirit and spirit in life. Though the psalm flows with poetic brilliance, the author says it is impossible for him to grasp as well as describe; he says, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain to it."

Have you ever tried to tell someone an event that occurred and realized midway that it's impossible for the other person to fully grasp your experience? All you can say is, "Well I guess you had to be there."

In John 1, Philip has this experience encountering Jesus. Jesus tells Philip to follow him, then Philip goes to his friend Nathanael and says he believes he's found the guy they've been waiting for. This person he wanted Nathanael to meet was not identical to God, he was the *Word* of God. He was exhibiting in the flesh, the mind of God. That is Word!

Nathanael replies, "What good ever came from Nazareth?" That's quite the rip on a city! We do the same thing! California versus Arizona, Everybody versus Texas, etc. What we are typically referring to is what someone is bringing from another place that we don't want. Less parking, congestion on the roads, reduced pedicure openings, expensive tee times, and season ticket sell offs to fans from visiting teams. It's about what they are bringing to our daily lives that will interrupt and disturb our way of living.

Philip doesn't even explain his encounter to his friend Nathanael. He simply says, "Come and see." For us, it might be to say to an irritated local, "Let's go have breakfast with my winter visitor friends," or "Come see Spirit in the Desert and see the labyrinth, have a meal with me."

Maybe Nathanael was right! Maybe what typically came from Nazareth was disturbing to them. In this case, however, it was what Jesus was bringing that Philip couldn't explain. He brought life. Jesus brought the Word of Life. Jesus brought the wisdom, insight, and creative energy. How brilliant were Philip's words in answer to Nathanael's bias; he didn't attempt to convince Nathanael, he simply said, "Come and see."

When was the last time you heard somebody say, "Come experience God with me!"? We debate, we argue, we try to get people into our heads, and not our hearts. We call it dialogue but it's not usually dialogue, it's agenda-driven debate. It's words, not Word.

Jesus brought life. Something that could be experienced, not explained, argued about, or debated. Philip just said, "Come and see." He knew that the experience was enough. It didn't need to be linked to a doctrine or a theology or a ritual. *Come and see that the Lord is good.* Jesus brought life.

The deep intimacy we experience in Spirit cannot be bred. For the most part, modern evangelism has been about breeding an emotional conversion experience. Transactional opportunities are created for others to trade in their lives for a new life. My sin for God's holiness. We then attempt to honor the transaction for the rest of our lives. This kind of religion can be explained and marketed easily. Statements of belief are written like the label on a shampoo bottle. Wash, rinse, and repeat. Or a medication taken as needed for relief from pain.

What we need is not what is outside of ourselves. We are in it, and it is in us. Power, wisdom, and reason. Completely immersed in Spirit.

Perhaps the popular dish soap commercial from the '70s had it right. Madge, the manicurist, tells her client how gentle the dish soap is on the hands and the client says, "I'll have to try it," and Madge says "You're soaking in it!" Modern evangelism and all of its expensive operations to create converts would be better with Madge as the evangelist. Someone might say, "I want to get closer to God. I need God in my life." Madge would say, "You're soaking in it! You were never separate from it. You just weren't taking advantage of its benefits." Gently she puts her fingers back in the solution and is aware of what surrounds and soothes her tired hands.

I was once a part of a non-denominational community, serving as a guest preacher. The community's Young Married group asked if I would do a class on spirituality. It was a very open and vibrant group, and they brought their questions. One gentleman said, "I'm all in as a Christian, but I always struggle silently with the idea that other people who don't believe like us will go to hell. It just doesn't make sense to me."

I shared with him a conversation I had with a professor at Fuller Seminary concerning the very same question. He drew a target on the board and described the center bullseye as absolute truth. He said, "For you, it is Jesus the Messiah." He drew an X on the edge of the bullseye and then said, "Now let's imagine the X is an individual that believes in the absolute truth. They have a leather-bound Bible they take to Starbucks; they tithe 11 percent and only listen to K-LOVE radio. He then drew an X far out on the margin of the entire target, far from the bullseye. "Let's say this person belongs to a different religion than ours. The question isn't how close to the bullseye of absolute truth a person is, it's which direction they are facing." He drew an arrow next to the Christian, pointing away from the target's bullseye. "Who is to say that the person far from the bullseye won't come face to face with Jesus after their death and say you are the one I was seeking all my life?"

Jesus said, "If you seek me, you will find me." He didn't add, "If you belong here or there." Seeking is everything! Not to acquire a belief in God, but a moment of clarity that God believes in me!

To this group, it was like they heard words that they had felt inside themselves for a long time. Perhaps our style of evangelism should be that of Madge and Philip. Come and see. You're soaking in it.

Jesus sees Nathanael and says, "Here is a genuine Israelite, a man whose heart has no guile." An Israelite would see this as a powerful acknowledgment, yet his suspicion leads him to say, "You don't even know me! How would you know that?" Jesus reveals, "I saw you under the fig tree." In that time a fig tree represented abundance and peace. A person sitting under a fig tree could be in reflection and meditation.

In Zachariah 3:10, Zach says to Josh, "In that day, the LORD of hosts, shall call every man his neighbor under the vine and under the fig tree."

It's a sign of fulfillment, abundance and peace. Jesus saw Nathanael under the fig tree and called him a welcoming sort and a man who sought God. Jesus brought life to Nathanael's practice.

What Jesus was bringing was peace, no more religious destruction, or death... a life that is forever. Jesus brought life. Jesus brought life into the temples. He brought life into the homes of the ailing. He brought life to the seas and to the valleys, to the mountain tops and the desert floors. Jesus brought life. Jesus did not choose life. Life was not chosen. He was soaking in it.

In response to the disciples asking for favor when he goes to heaven, Jesus answered, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand."

What are we waiting for? Why do we stand staring at the clouds? Why does the soul long for what it already has? The kingdom of heaven is at our fingertips. Jesus brought life. He brought power, wisdom and the mind of God and declared, "You're soaking in it!"

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.