



So Very Loved – Touchpoint for March 6, 2024

John 3:14-21 (NRSVUE) God So Loved the World

¹⁴ And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶ “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷ “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Those who believe in him are not condemned, but those who do not believe are condemned already because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. ²¹ But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

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

We use Mystery to describe the ineffable nature of God. We accept the scripture, “No one has ever seen God.” Yet, Jesus was seen. So, was Jesus truly God? I’m not going to answer the question. You might yell, “Chicken!”, but bear with me. The implications in answering the question for any of us may or may not be viewed as an attack on Christianity as a religion. Western Christianity demands a yes or no answer. Why? Some would say your destiny depends on your answer. Does it?

Answers to this question are typically based on, but not limited to, these assumptions:

1. There must be only one definitive answer, either yes or no.
2. The Bible must be revered as the literal Word(s) of God.
3. The affirmative answer must be verbalized for true salvation to be valid.
4. What we are being saved from is a literal Hell. Though God is loving, it is out of God’s hands if we heard, but did not ever say it with our words, and believed it without doubting.
5. Jesus was the biological child of God based on the virgin birth. Therefore, he is the literal “Son of God.” This, then, requires a bigger belief, that of the virginity of Mary.

Problem, problems, problems as we sink deeper into the rabbit hole.

The escape route is to steer the question back to faith, faith in what does not make sense. Faith in the seemingly outlandish events which led to Jesus being declared, literally, God. These are indeed beautiful and miraculous events in themselves. They point us humans to a story of engagement with the Divine, to events that also must be believed, without question, to save us from Hell and set us on the glorious yellow brick road. We wait for it with great longing, as we labor through this life on Earth. We don’t live it, we tolerate it.

Or as the Jim Reeves song goes, “This world is not my home, I’m just a passing through.”

Here’s a perspective from Richard Rohr on Jesus. “He never doubts his union with God, and he hands on union with God to us through this fully participatory universe.”

I will never forget the dialogue I had with my first spiritual director, Scott Haasarud, a man that the people of Spirit in the Desert will always remember. My sessions with Scott were a brave place, where I could honor and give voice to all my doubts and curiosities.

During one session, I told Scott that I dreamt I was wearing a theological leash. When I strayed, I would feel both a call to explore, and a jerk back to prevent me from exploring. Over the years, more and more slack was given. The leash was a little longer, but I remained theologically within “safe” boundaries. I had more and more room to venture, but stayed tethered to a modern orthodoxy of evangelicalism.

Then a new dream came. In my dream, I asked God if it were ok if I questioned the belief that Jesus was literally God. I felt naughty. Suddenly, the leash came completely off, and I ran free like a dog in a park. I could go anywhere, but my master was near, and I was safe.

Scott connected me with New Testament scholar, Marcus Borg, saying, “I’m not sure if Marcus believes Jesus was literally God, but I’ve never met a man who followed Jesus better.”

Since then, I’ve come to understand that I don’t know if Jesus was literally God, nor do I think anyone else living today does. But to paraphrase Borg, I do believe Jesus is the very revelation of the compassion of God. I’ll find out the mystery someday. Until then, I’ll run free in life’s park IN God with all my unknowing, experiencing with abandon the depths of Divine love IN Christ. Every Wednesday we proclaim, “IN whom we live and IN whom we move and IN whom we have our being.”

Perhaps this is what John meant when he said the deeds that would be exposed by the light were all done IN God. *I was never separate!*

It is our fear of exposure that drives us into darkness with our doubts and questions. Divine light cannot be hidden. Divine light does not refuse to shine in darkness; therefore, it exposes the truth, the truth that we are IN God. Even in our deeds, even in the audacity of asking non-conforming questions, whether we are sinners or saints, we are IN God. The separation from God was an illusion of our making. Perhaps the greater sin is we claimed to know the answer.

The Bible does refer to Jesus being the Son of God.

How did the Jews hear the phrase, “Son of God”?

Messiah in Hebrew means “anointed.” To the Jews, Son of God meant, one anointed with special powers and functions. For many Jews, it was a term for the coming Messiah, which meant being anointed to restore Israel to the age when Israel enjoyed the rule of David.

In Caesarea Philippi, the area was flooded with temples built to numerous gods and prophets. They debated the identity of Jesus. Some said Elijah was the forerunner to the Messiah; others said Jeremiah, and Moses and more, all flattery to these men of greatness. But Peter said, “You are something beyond human titles.” Jesus returned the compliment to Peter, “And so are you, Peter!” You are *Petros*, the rock. Jesus was also called the rock; so, was Peter, God? Abraham was called the rock; was Abraham, God? Titles were important then and now. The scriptures say you and I are seated in heavenly places. How’s that for a position of status?

Jesus took his place as the Son of God and returned the compliment to us. To believe Jesus is the Son of God is to believe that we, too, are the children of God, a title greater than any title a human being can be given.

It is a mind-blowing idea that the powerless are given power beyond the origin of all power available to us on this earth. The least of these are given abundance greater than all the possessions on this earth. To those who

have traded their faithful allegiance to a celebrity, athlete, president or former president and to themselves for a truly anointed one with humility and unity... to them has been given the power to be the sons and daughters of God. Does this mean *we* are God? Eternal life—*zoe* in Greek—is vitality and fulfillment right now, even as you are hearing this! Not in the future or in the past... the eternal is now. For the Kingdom of Heaven to be experienced, it must capture our thoughts and save from us from our assumptions. It's a renewing of the mind.

James Finley says we are like the man who owned a beautiful mansion, but did not have the keys. The man slept in a tent outside the mansion and invited friends over. With great pride, he gave them a tour, inviting his friends to peer through the windows. "Here is my kitchen and over there is the dining room." They'd respond, "It's beautiful!" "Yeah, I like it a lot," he'd say. "Would you like to see the upstairs?" He gets a ladder and shows them the bedrooms. "Wow," the friends gasp, "What a beautiful mansion!" He responds with pride, "Thank you. I really like it!" They say goodbye and the man goes back to his tent, all while never inhabiting the mansion he owns.

Belonging is connected to truth, whether I believe it or not.

Believing is about the renewing of thoughts, aligning them with the truth that I belong.

Behaving is living out of the alignment that I believe that I belong.

Was Jesus literally, God. I don't know.

Here's a question even more interesting to me. Is God, Jesus? Was all of God contained in the person of Jesus? No? Do I believe that Jesus had a divine awareness that he was one with God? Yes.

May we, like Jesus, grow into the awareness of our oneness with God. No wonder Jesus is never quoted saying, "Worship me." He said, "Follow me."

Amen

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taizé Choir)

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)

See Him

(Keith Duke)

See him... 1) Silent and lifeless 2) Alone and forlorn
3) Broken and helpless... crowned with a garland of thorns
4) As son and as brother 5) Related to all
6) Through the grief of a mother... hurting the most of all
7) As healer and teacher 8) As helper and friend
9) As prophet and preacher... Ignore Him? I doubt if you can.

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer

("Our Father," Taizé Reflections)

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.

Amen.