



TOUCH POINT

Third Party Gods – Touchpoint for April 10, 2024

1 John 3:1-7 (NRSVUE)

¹ See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. ³ And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

⁴ Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. ⁵ You know that he was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. ⁶ No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him. ⁷ Little children, let no one deceive you. Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.

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

I had a philosophy teacher at Phoenix College named Surrendra Gangadean. He was a Christian who switched from practicing Hinduism to Christianity and is now a Doctor of Reformed Theology.

I was in the middle of my charismatic days and my friend, Robert, and I would go to his office and chat about theology. One day I continued the conversation with him privately. During the conversation Dr. Gangadean asked me, "Henry, why were you created?" Since I was speaking to a very educated man, I wanted to make sure my answer was right. I stated what I had been taught by my evangelical mentors during my Jesus Movement early teen years. I answered, "To serve him." How could that be wrong? Gangadean responded, "Oh, so God needed slaves." Not surprisingly, that didn't feel right anymore, and I gave it another shot. "To glorify him," I said. "Ah, so God needed your flashlight, he wasn't full in his glory." That didn't go as planned either. I had one last lifeline to save my entrenched belief. I thought surely my next answer would nail it. "To love Him," I said. "Nailed it!" I thought. Gangadean responded, "So then, God needed friends. He was lacking."

I learned then and there that understanding God does not need to make sense, but it needs to be reasonable. Dr. Gangadean suggested I read the Bible to see what it says and meet with him again. I began searching for the answers I gave him, hoping I was right. That also did not go well. I found no support. At our next meeting, I told Gangadean what I'd found in answer to his question, "Why were you created?" "I found nothing," I said. He asked, "Are you sure there was nothing?" I replied, "Well, there was one thing, but it doesn't seem right. I was created because it pleased him." Gangadean said, "Yes! It pleased him." It was out of pleasure that we were created. "Henry," he said, "No one says, 'Honey, let's go upstairs and make Bob!' It is out of pleasure that children are created. To bring them into our world."

This was the beginning of my theology, built from questioning what is not reasonable. Today the theologian Surrendra Gangadean and I could not be farther apart in our theological understanding of God. But as a community college Philosophy professor in 1976, he rocked my world, and I'm grateful.

This is my perspective today: *We were created to be the recipient of all of God's love with no expectations.*

This does not make sense to the mind that clings to a standard of responsibilities and clear expectations to prove we've been accepted by God. We may think anything less, would make God an irresponsible God. More importantly, we may want to think we are special, and set apart through our earning, or by reciting an

evangelical incantation. It elevates us and insulates us from needing to display humility, vulnerability, and global unity.

There are some provocative statements in 1 John 3:

- ... in him there is no sin;
- No one who abides in him sins;
- No one who sins has either seen him or known him;
- Little children, let no one deceive you; everyone who does what is right is righteous.

Perhaps a comma is missing after, 'in Him.' "In Him, there is no sin." It matches with our call to abide, In Him. To be "In Him," there is no sin.

When we abide in The Way, we linger. We stay. We remain. We are present and we stand and tarry.

The Greek for this form of abide is *meno*. For example, Jesus told the disciples he was tired and weary, and he asked them to remain, to tarry. There could be a word study on the numerous times *meno* is used in the Bible.

Another Greek word translation for abiding is *samak*. It means to lean on and to be supported in stillness.

I like the words linger or hang out.

In 2014, I was given a picture by a patient who was in treatment. I was speaking in group, and I saw him drawing. The idea of hanging out with God resonated with him, and he drew a beautiful picture that read, "God just wants to hang out with you."

When we linger and hang out with the God of our understanding, we develop godliness. Godliness is not perfection or good behavior. It means the longer we spend with someone, the more we begin to resemble them. God is love; therefore, loveliness is the result. There is no room for haughtiness, religiosity, smack talking, bullying, judging, racism, etc. If these presentations of self become exposed, they may reflect we've given third party gods an inordinate amount of time. I'll let you decide who and what your third party gods are.

My online identity was recently compromised. I let my guard down and a lot of my identifying IDs and passwords were stolen. All the thief needed was to keep me on my smart phone long enough to gradually gain more and more access. This third party did not enter on its own; they claimed they were tech support when I called for help. Embarrassingly and unwittingly, I gave them access and I lingered.

We can also give God access.

Our identity declared by God is precious. No one has access to clouding our identity unless we allow it. It is important we give ourselves to the practice of abiding in God, the only one who has access to my heart and all its passwords.

When this abundance of abiding is spent with third party gods, we ourselves have coronated, we become lost in false identities.

Let's look once again at the passage.

"The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; **what we will be has not yet been revealed.** What we do know is this: **when he is revealed,** we will be like him, for **we will see him as he is."**

What this says to me is, we don't know who he is. The world does not know who he is, and I do not know who my true self is. The only one left to know is God. I am not required to know; it will be revealed. I am invited to abide in the one who knows.

No wonder Jesus said, "You may cry Lord, Lord and I will say I don't know you." Perhaps he was saying I know your true self, but I don't know this false self you've created. To abide with the lover of our true soul is to take the crisis out of identity.

Let's each ask ourselves, 'Where do we linger the most? Where do we abide? What stokes our inner fire?' This is an invitation, not a judgment. Compassion longs to take us by the hand and walk with us. Spirit's compassion will celebrate the uncovering of false identities we've created, both of ourselves and of the third party gods.

Even the beautiful identities, who have become an attachment, need to be dethroned.

Talking about it alone can cause some discomfort. Our time spent continuously with third party gods is being threatened. If you find you can't stop on your own, perhaps there is an addiction... to your apps, to your way of thinking, to a love relationship, or even a substance. There is no shame, simply awareness, and a call to freedom. Remember these things are not necessarily bad, but the access they may have been given to dictate our identity could be bad.

In abiding, the goal is to experience God, and in that, experience freedom. God's pleasure. To live unencumbered, and forever one with God, humanity, and this earth.

This passage in 1 John 3 closes with, "Little children, everyone who does right, is righteous."

Whoa, whoa, whoa! But he's referring to Christians who have met up to the evangelical prerequisites and expectations, right?! Depends. Would you like to take it to your inner sin manager, or to the one who manages your sin and surrounds you with the kingdom of righteousness?

Because *In Him*, there is no sin.

Amen

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taizé Choir)

Be still, know that I am God

Spirit Divine

(Keith Duke)

Spirit of love, enfold and teach us; Spirit of peace, rest deep within;
Spirit of change, transform and heal us; Spirit divine; Spirit divine.

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 Haugen)

Refrain: Healer of our ev'ry ill, light of each tomorrow,
give us peace beyond our fear, and hope beyond our sorrow.

- 1 You who know our fears and sadness, grace us with your peace and gladness;
Spirit of all comfort, fill our hearts. Refrain
- 2 In the pain and joy beholding how your grace is still unfolding,
give us all your vision, God of love. Refrain
- 3 Give us strength to love each other, ev'ry sister, ev'ry brother;
Spirit of all kindness, be our guide. Refrain
- 4 You who know each thought and feeling, teach us all your way of healing;
Spirit of compassion, fill each heart. Refrain.

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer

("Our Father," The London Fox Taizé Choir)

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 in the guarding of Christ, the guarding of the Holy Spirit be upon you. Amen.