



TOUCH POINT

Shape of My Heart – Touchpoint for July 3, 2024

Mark 6:1-13 (NRSVUE) The Rejection of Jesus of Nazareth

⁶ He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. ² On the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, “Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! ³ Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him. ⁴ Then Jesus said to them, “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown and among their own kin and in their own house.” ⁵ And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. ⁶ And he was amazed at their unbelief.

The Mission of the Twelve

Then he went about among the villages teaching. ⁷ He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. ⁸ He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff: no bread, no bag, no money in their belts, ⁹ but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. ¹⁰ He said to them, “Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. ¹¹ If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.” ¹² So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. ¹³ They cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

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

Plato said that education does not consist in telling people new things; it consists in extracting from their memories what they already know. No message is more effective than that which speaks to a man's own conscience, and that message becomes well-nigh irresistible when it is spoken by a man who obviously has the right to speak.

These words give me pause. Who am I listening to? Who am I choosing to lead me?

I'm reading a book by Frank Rogers, my spiritual director, called *Cradled in the Arms of Compassion*. It is a beautiful and heart wrenching book about a brother and sister who were victims of childhood abuse. It covers the siblings' lifelong journey of recovery from severe trauma. Frank is now a professor at Claremont. He survived and flourishes. His sister took her life.

Frank decided to tell his story of survival and his sister's story of pain. Frank is bold in telling his story in his gentleness of voice and powerful heart. He has earned the right to call others to compassion through his writings and courses on compassion. Frank is equipped as a psychologist and a teacher. But what he is writing reminds me of Mark, the gospel writer.

I cannot read Mark without thinking of John the Baptizer. A man who said he was unfit, yet called others to become aware of what they already know about themselves... truths that will not be buried in the ground but rather fill the baptism waters of community and mingle with the stories of others. These stories are from people like John, who declared his unworthiness to Jesus, only to be declared worthy by the humility of Jesus.

The disciples were told to not equip themselves. That's crazy! We must look at this and say it defies all discipleship trainings. “Okay guys, no phones, one pair of Tevas, no skids, no Igloos, no jerky, no Hydroflasks,

no gluten-free bread! You don't even need me! Heal 'em, love 'em, and if they reject you, screw 'em!" That's a harsh interpretation, but it's another way of saying, "Don't get discouraged, move on; don't dwell."

Jesus was disparaged in his hometown. It was said of Jesus that he had nowhere to lay his head. Yet he knew where the home of his heart was. Mark may have identified with John in the wilderness; Mark had been rejected by Paul, the spiritual titan.

It wasn't John's skills that made him successful, it was his self-effacement that drew others to him. Locusts were his power bar, and camel hair was his protection from the elements. People flocked to hear this man who was in the wilderness, guiding the crowds to prepare the way of the heart.

Where are those who will speak humble truths with uninhibited passion? Who will choose to be bathed in God's compassion over personal dominion? Who will speak with the purpose of the prophets? Those who invested their lives in arresting the church from the throws of personal and collective selfish ambitions?

I'm wondering where is the awe in our faith right now? Who speaks of the Spirit's nudges and movements in their day-to-day lives? Don't get me wrong: I see the passion of belief, as I'm sure you do. We see it in factions, the extremists, Bible thumpers, political demagogues and their followers. We see it in the deafening silence of the complicit.

Contemplative writers and leaders like me are called to be voices in the wilderness of our times. But I see even us getting caught up in the language of our practices. We use phrases like, holding space, awareness, being still, soul friend, deep listening, living the questions, etc. I use them all the time, they are beautiful tools! But how do we keep them from becoming words of spiritual specialness much like *Christianize*? It's not intentional for them to become *clichéd*, but it comes upon us when we swim in the pools of sameness. The same people, the same institutions, the same theology. We seek out 'like-mindedness.' Forsaking the 'all in all.'

The phrase "All Are Welcome" on church marquees is just as untrue in practice as the conspiracy group Q-ANON's, "When we go, we all go." It's a meaningful tagline lost in incompatible actions or code for its followers.

Many in the conspiracy groups are evangelicals promoting the second coming of Jesus. We've heard for years the phrase, 'Jesus would not be recognized by today's Christian culture if he were to return now.' It appears more like reality as many support Christian violence and discrimination while turning a blind eye to corruption. Not the behaviors we would expect from a group that used to ask, "What would Jesus do?"

Isn't it sad? It appears that we haven't learned from John's example of humility. Peter's and Paul's stories of being humbled. Mary's life of humility and Mark's heartfelt urging for us to see what he witnessed. How did we learn who to hate by being Bible people?

Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe it's present in our small communities, but it feels like love and passion for the radical Jesus has gone underground for fear of poking Christian extremists and political evangelicals, or my fear that I may be off target, theologically.

Well, I don't think Jesus is leading us into underground gatherings. We are doing it ourselves. Underground is where the roots of our ancestors are, those who spoke like Mark. They in the world around us, pleading for love's passion and compassion.

I sense we will be okay, and it's because of the teaching and life of our mentor, Jesus. The Spirit still draws humans to itself and will flood the willing soul who cries, "I'm unfit!" To those who will admit it, perhaps the Spirit of Jesus laughs and says, "You were never expected to be fit!"

In our helplessness, we allow our stories of inadequacy to mingle in the waters of collective brokenness and we “fit” together. Where we are unfit, we replace expectations with the freedom to be real, to be surprised, and be awed.

Perhaps we must replace intellectual thinking with a heart of compassion for those right here. Those who go unseen because we fear those across the border, the shore, the ideological and political divide. Our compassion can be like Mark’s. It is also found in Sting’s beautiful song called *Shape of My Heart*:

*I know that the spades are the swords of a soldier
I know that the clubs are weapons of war
I know that diamonds mean money for this art
But that's not the shape of my heart
That's not the shape of my heart.*

Let’s engage the passage once again from *The Message* translation:

⁷⁻⁸ Jesus called the Twelve to him, and sent them out in pairs. He gave them authority and power to deal with the evil opposition. He sent them off with these instructions:

⁸⁻⁹ “Don’t think you need a lot of extra equipment for this. You are the equipment. No special appeals for funds. Keep it simple. ¹⁰ And no luxury inns. Get a modest place and be content there until you leave.

¹¹ “If you’re not welcomed, not listened to, quietly withdraw. Don’t make a scene. Shrug your shoulders and be on your way.”

¹²⁻¹³ Then they were on the road. They preached with joyful urgency that life can be radically different; right and left they sent the demons packing; they brought wellness to the sick, anointing their bodies, healing their spirits.

We have been told, or we may think, that we need to be fit. Boy scouts need to be prepared, yes! But why do we need to be prepared to love... to engage strangers and deliver life-giving seeds of new beginnings or watering the seeds already scattered? Jesus said, “You don’t need any other equipment; you *are* the equipment!” In talking to Samuel he said, “They don’t need a king to tell them what to do, they have me!”

I asked, who do we want to be our leaders? I want to be led by the bruised, the ones who have mouthed the words, ‘I’m unfit,’ like Mark, John, and Jesus, not the ones competing to be the G.O.A.T., the greatest of all time. There is only one and the rest are the ones made fit by their admission.

I can do all things through the compassion that strengthens me. I know it’s Christ who strengthens me. But I believe Jesus was the very revelation of God’s compassion. What if we were to replace the name, Jesus, with *Compassion* and God with *Love* for personal understanding? We just may experience a point of touching engagement.

Hmmm. Touch Point.

Amen.

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taizé Choir)

Be still, know that I am God

Spirit of the Loving God

(Celtic Spirits)

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.

Break me, melt me, mold me, fill me.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Come, Bring Your Burdens to God (Woza Nomthwalo Wakho)

(John L. Bell, The Wild Goose Collection)

Swahili: Woza nomthwalo wakho,
Woza nomthwalo wakho,
Woza nomthwalo wakho, Uyes' akasozathi hayi.

Come, bring your burdens to God,
come, bring your burdens to God,
Come, bring your burdens to God for Jesus will never say no.

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer (Our Father)

(The London Fox Taizé Choir)

Benediction

Sevenfold Amen

(Keith Duke)

Christ before me. Christ behind me.
Christ above me. Christ below me.
Christ to left and Christ to right.
Christ within both day and night.