



TOUCH POINT

## John, Jesus and Ravi – Touchpoint for July 10, 2024

### Mark 6:14-29 (NRSVUE) The Death of John the Baptist

<sup>14</sup> King Herod heard of it, for Jesus's name had become known. Some were saying, "John the baptizer has been raised from the dead, and for this reason these powers are at work in him." <sup>15</sup> But others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." <sup>16</sup> But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised."

<sup>17</sup> For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her. <sup>18</sup> For John had been telling Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." <sup>19</sup> And Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to kill him. But she could not, <sup>20</sup> for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed, and yet he liked to listen to him. <sup>21</sup> But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. <sup>22</sup> When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests, and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it." <sup>23</sup> And he swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom." <sup>24</sup> She went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?" She replied, "The head of John the baptizer." <sup>25</sup> Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." <sup>26</sup> The king was deeply grieved, yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. <sup>27</sup> Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's<sup>[g]</sup> head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, <sup>28</sup> brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. <sup>29</sup> When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

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

I've often lived in the illusion that my words were of great importance. Simply because I had power. I am a father. I've been a pastor. I am a counselor. Therefore, what I say is the word.

Those with power and pride will only be obeyed. The powerful believe they are being revered and respected, yet may only be idolized or feared.

How we embrace our power determines whether we will be followed and respected or worse, obeyed and parroted. Those who possess both humility and power will be followed. A populist wields his or her power with allure and an air of celebrity. Respect be damned, if those qualities cause their immorality to be overlooked! The desire to be near a famous face and live as though you have favor from them answers the question, "Why do good girls go for bad boys?" I'm afraid we have often been pied-pipered into being one of those girls or boys.

John the Baptist was popular with the humble, those who were drawn to a new way. Humble is not exhibited in John the same way we would expect. He told Herod his marriage was wrong; he was beheaded. Why? Though he was offering a path of to freedom for people who were prepared, it was stifling to the beguiling power mongers.

Today, we are still drawn to those with humble wisdom and prophetic warnings, yet we choose a mesmerizing, unabashed populist who will remove challenging voices by beheading their intent, character and righteousness.

How can it happen? It happens, in my opinion, because the real voices are those crying in the wilderness. Their voices alone resonate with a message of belonging, hope, and the universal nature of love. How else would we be able to put what we thought was important aside at the birth of a baby or the death of a loved one? Perhaps it's because the voice of challenging love that beckons us to go another way is at times a disturbing invitation. It would mean death to my ego, my occupation and my position in the life I have created. Even if it needed others' participation or votes to get there.

We spend billions to put people in leadership, thinking they will do our bidding, maybe change the world. And if they do not give us what we want, we behead them and take away their voices. This seems to happen after they beheaded the voices around them who informed them that their attachments and addictions are not good for them or the people around them.

How am I to look at the Touchpoint that has arisen in me? I want to see my writing as essential, as an invitation to transform the world around me. Damn! This is what John was calling me to repent from. How easy the three demons, the need to be right, enough and in control creep into my mind and heart till I sip from the intoxicating bottle of pride.

Perhaps John was a voice for all the attachments that become entrapments on our way to the freedom that awaits us. How insidious is this hubris when it reaches the depths of harm to others. At some point we need to assess the movement of those we've idolized. After all, they're only human.

When I attended my first spiritual direction weekend retreat at Stillpoint: The Center for Christian Spirituality, I was barely into the 2-year program, and we were asked to practice in triads: one, the spiritual director; one, the other directee; and one a witness, for feedback. As a counselor, pastor, and speaker for many years, I thought I'd be good at this. Well, I made the first guy cry, in a good way, I thought. I simply took him to a place that resonated with him.

Ravi, my mentor, said to my collar-popping self, "Henry, you went to the place it needed to go." I said, "Thank you, Ravi." I'd always taken pride in my magic in the behavioral health world! I don't remember his exact words, but he also said something like this: "But your directee did not go there on his own. You took him there. Discernment listens deeply, as the directee seeks inner discernment. You are simply seeking discernment with him as a midwife to his birth of new awakenings." All I heard was, "Henry, you suck." My pride hurt and muffled and wrestled with his knowing discernment. I so wanted Ravi's favor, like Opie, fishing with Andy Griffith. Ravi was not enamored by popularity and fame. Ravi was a voice to my populist pride. I thought, "Well, others like what I do."

More happened in that session, and I went to my room and packed, ready to walk out of the Episcopal retreat center in LA's Echo Park. I yelled to no one, aloud, "I can't believe I'm paying for this abuse!" I sat on the edge of the bed and heard a voice inside me saying, "Henry, they are just a bunch of human beings." (There was an expletive before the word 'human' that I left out.) I returned to the group and talked with Ravi, and he said, "Henry don't ever lose your magic. But in spiritual direction, it's about the directee, and how Spirit directs them together. You are a witness; listen for your own prompts."

For so many of my years in the treatment world, I would often have only one meeting with a client, and I needed to get the client there quickly. But 'Listening to my discernment'. This was different. I needed to listen to the voice (Ravi), calling me into my own wilderness and away from the pride of populism.

May we never behold the voice of Spirit's guidance; it may come in the most unlikely places. And may we never fall for the beguiling prideful voices of untamed power and veiled promises, or for those who pander by the pools of popularity. May we go to the uncomfortable wilderness to seek out our inner John in the deep places of our hearts. His call will lead us to our brother, Jesus.

Jesus was silenced, but where the Spirit is of the Lord is, there is freedom.

**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.