



TOUCH POINT

## Rest for the Inner Orphan – Touchpoint for July 17, 2024

### Mark 6:30-34, 53-56 (NRSVUE) Feeding the Five Thousand

<sup>30</sup>The apostles gathered around Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. <sup>31</sup>He said to them, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. <sup>32</sup>And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. <sup>33</sup>Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. <sup>34</sup>As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he began to teach them many things.

### Healing the Sick in Gennesaret

<sup>53</sup>When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. <sup>54</sup>When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him <sup>55</sup>and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. <sup>56</sup>And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.

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

If you are new to this weekly Touchpoint, the passages used here today were comprised by councils and offered to congregations around the globe. They coincide with the annual feasts of the Christian church. It’s called the lectionary.

I was raised Presbyterian and I’m familiar with many of the mainline traditions, but not this one. I’ve been out of mainline churches for some time.

When I first began at Spirit in the Desert, I learned we typically use the lectionary calendar for the Touchpoints. Sounded stifling to me. Though I was given gracious freedom to be Henry and use or deviate from the lectionary, I accepted the challenge to offer my take with other clergy sharing their Touchpoints worldwide.

I have loved the experience of being challenged by the text. It’s not without a few bumps. When I hit a bump, I may call Jim Hanson or one of the other pastors I know with exegetical chops. Jim, as others will usually say follow your gut and heart or go a different direction.

Let’s be clear. I have no idea how to make sense of the sequence of these passages. The passages are lifted and patched together from different places in the chapter. Pulling portions together, like we did today, sometimes leaves out context. In addition, it gets tough when the gospel writer uses passive pronouns.

Nevertheless, here’s what I’m seeing in the story.

The disciples are tuckered out and hungry. They took nothing with them on their mission trip. They relied on others for basic needs. They healed people, shared truths and maybe raised a few from the dead. I don’t know if you’ve ever raised someone from the dead, but you can really get tired and hungry when you aren’t allowed to take so much as a power bar. Not to mention, your psyche will need some debriefing.

Jesus compassionately tells the disciples to take some rest. The passage reads, “*He*” said to them, “Come away to a deserted place *all by yourselves...*”

Here's where I get confused. According to the storyteller Jesus said, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves." I assume this meant Jesus was going with the disciples. But wouldn't he have said, so "we" can be by ourselves? Which is it?

Next, the crowd recognizes the disciples as they shove off. The crowd beats them on foot to the other side and are waiting. How'd they do that? Was Jesus going with them or not? Jesus having the disciples take a boat that short of a distance must speak to how worn out they were. It sounds like Jesus went way out of his way to get rest to the disciples. Perhaps I should let go of trying to figure out how people outran a boat or figuring out Jesus' location. I'm sure I'll find an app for that later. Letting Spirit shepherd us, means listening for the prompts to slow down or even go away to heal.

During my sabbatical and recovery from cancer treatments, I stayed with Michael and Becky McCabe, who graciously turned their home into a hermitage. Michael had been one of my high school church youth advisors. I would get up early and find the two of them on the patio fully engaged in conversation and planning their next project. They had a rhythm to their outdoor projects of gardening, landscaping and general maintenance. Every day had a tempo. I began to embrace this unfamiliar way of being. Typically, it involved morning coffee and conversation on the patio with their very therapeutic blue healer/Australian cattle dog named Ginger. Sometimes our conversation involved a book we were reading, or family or sports.

Ginger became my morning companion. I'm not sure who was supporting who.

The landscaping was out of my comfort zone. Though 65, I was a novice to much more than mowing and trimming. Michael invited me to participate in some heavy work without expectation. I worried I would mess something up, kill something in his yard or tip a load of dirt. My technique was painful for him to watch, I'm sure. It took a long time for me to become accustomed to this type of early morning outdoor physical labor.

For Michael, it was a spiritual experience: feeling the soil, engaging all things living, planning the transformation of the compost pits and strategizing a new look for the hermitage. Being an amateur at these types of projects I moved with haste sometimes, not wanting to be the weak link in the project. Sometimes, Michael would come near me and say, "Stop, Henry." I would stop and he would show me an easier way to do a task. He would remind me to breathe. I got in touch with my curious mind, and desire to ask for instructions more than once, without shame, and especially to learn to slow down. Michael would say, "The goal isn't to finish the project."

Keeping up with my desire to look efficient and gain his approval would sometimes put me and the project at risk. If I did break something or miss a direction Michael would laugh and say, "It's just stuff!" He would often see me wrestle with a tool and say, "Slow down, Henry. Put the wheelbarrow down and let's take a coffee break." It's seemed odd for me to be told to slow down or take a break. I was raised with the message to never stand around, to get busy. The work ethic in my day, even in football practice, was that real ball players didn't take water breaks until given permission.

At the McCabe hermitage, they modeled the rhythms of Jesus. I was being given permission to listen to my body, to rest when I chose to and drink water and coffee as often as needed. It took a short amount of time to recover physically, but my psyche needed two years at the McCabe Hermitage to feel the permission to learn my own rhythms. This work went from an overwhelming task, to a joy. Perhaps this is similar to using the lectionary calendar!

Meanwhile, back at the un-deserted shore, the people recognized Jesus coming also. They brought people from everywhere in the region to be healed. Jesus cared for them all.

Every week in the gospels we read about the kingdom, the revelations of Jesus as the Messiah etc., but something appeared different in this story of healings. It is Jesus carrying for his dear apprentices. As the

mission trip work of the disciples ended, Jesus carried the burden of the work so much, for so many, that his compassion emanated from the fringes of his cloak.

He sees the people as sheep without a shepherd. Jesus had been showing the disciples that they have a Shepherd beyond the kingdoms of this world and that there's more than enough of him to share. Jesus told the disciples to rest from their work while he cares less for the Shepherd. The disciples were taking their short sabbatical but there were still people suffering.

Have you ever had a boss encourage you to take time off saying, "I'll do your work for you"? When was the last time you had a boss "see" you and recognize you were burning out, then encourage you to rest before going back to work?

You might think, 'Others have more difficult, more demanding jobs than I; I don't deserve to rest.' Maybe you wonder, 'Is there no one who will see the burden I carry?' Perhaps you've thought, 'I love my job, my work as a parent or as a student, but I'm overwhelmed.' Maybe we need to channel our inner Jesus and Michael McCabe. Maybe we need to listen for the Shepherd's call to a deserted place.

Jesus was the shepherd of the disciples, sending them off to rest. He saw others scattered aimlessly, as sheep without a shepherd.

Finally, I found my nugget in the lectionary text. Forget the passive pronouns, the sequence of events, the errors in grammar. Let it go! We have a Shepherd! To have a Shepherd resonates differently this time. Jesus looked out and saw the people. Like, *really* saw their orphaned lives and hearts. God sees us.

Tommy Walker, musician and songwriter from Calvary Assembly in Eagle Rock, California, wrote a song describing a young boy he met on a mission trip. (Tommy himself grew up desperately shy.)

This 7-year-old boy asked him every morning, "You know me, right? What's my name?" Tommy would answer, "Jesse! Your name's Jesse!" The young boy answered excitedly, "That's right, because you know me!" "Yes, I know you," Tommy would reply.

The young, orphaned boy was a sheep without a shepherd. He wanted to be seen.

On the day the disciples returned from their mission trip, they were told to rest. Jesus shepherded the orphans he saw.

Many of us are like orphans in need of a Shepherd. The psalmist knows what it means to be sent by his Shepherd to a deserted place. Then the God of compassion says, "I know what you've been through. I see you and not only that... I know your name!"

### **Psalm 23**

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures;

He leads me beside still waters;

He restores my soul.

He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,

and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

**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.