



TOUCH POINT

Name, Image, and Likeness – Touchpoint for September 11, 2024

Mark 8:27-33 (NRSVUE) Peter's Declaration about Jesus

²⁷ Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi, and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” ²⁸ And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” ²⁹ He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.”^[a] ³⁰ And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection

³¹ Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes and be killed and after three days rise again. ³² He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

May the light of the Liberator guide your path, grounding you in truth and love.

Peter was the one Jesus said he would build his church. Maybe this is the warning to his church never to allow anything to get in the way of God's guidance and their given identity. Church institutions are vital to the service of the universal church, for connection, community, and a reminder of intrinsic belonging. Vital until its mission becomes bigger than the one it proposes to follow and fights to protect its purported rights. Relevant and vital until it becomes something to protect and defend. Jesus did not fight to prevent persecution or rejection. Neither did he want Peter and his church to go there. Jesus wanted us liberated from any form of identity war. All are made in the likeness of God. That's all we need to know.

Like these times, the tribal laws and traditions of the times of Jesus were threatened by none other than liberation from them.

It is a dark day for anyone who feels their created world of influence is falling apart. When their life's meaning can no longer be propped up, protected, or defended by a misguided tribal theology or philosophy. A deeply engrained way of being that may very well have misled and unintentionally misinformed others.

Deep regret follows when we discover we've inflicted our theology, philosophy, or laws on those around us from a place of influence.

Like Joshua Harris, who Pastored a Megachurch in Maryland and wrote a best seller called *Kissing Dating Goodbye*. After this young Christian pied piper instructed teens and families that premarital sex could be prevented by not dating and that dating was a precursor for future divorce, he recanted it 17 years later. By then, those teens had their own families and spoke out of the harm done. His desire to change the world had given Harris a platform and created a mega church. When did it come tumbling down? When did he decide to change his theology? It was when it affected his own life. It was when he and his wife decided to no longer be married and remain friends. In the evangelical world, Joshua was attacked not for his message but for his divorce. He eventually left the God he believed in. I assume Joshua Harris's intentions were good. So were Peter's.

Jesus told his followers he would undergo great suffering, be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, be killed, and then, after three days, rise again.

For this contemplative moment, let's leave off the part about rising after three days. Let's reflect on the first part about suffering, rejection, and being murdered.

Why would Jesus say this to the disciples? Most commentaries would say that he is predicting these events because they were preordained. We want to believe there was a prophetic purpose in his suffering. Maybe it's to loosen the inability to wrap our mind around his horrific murder.

One explanation for his words to the disciples is that it happened because God the Father said it had to happen ahead of time. It was part of God's story, and we demanded it, so we accept it.

Jesus becomes just a willing victim. I don't want to debate this because it simply doesn't matter to me whether he knew it proved Jesus was in cahoots with God. I want to look at Jesus's human experience at that time and try to understand the culture and what he was up against.

He surely knew his words were dangerous and his methods unorthodox. Jesus had no illusions concerning the disturbances he was causing with the powers to be. His claims were perilous because they were creating freedom for people to live and move and have their being. His words of healing liberated them from their physical, religious, and political ideas. The three things his enemies wanted to control.

Let's get our eyes out of the clouds of Christianity for just a minute and see into his humanity. I think if we do this just for a moment, we can see what Jesus was up against.

Like you and I talking as close friends bound by many experiences, he is talking to his intimate friends. They had been through a lot together and certainly would be in denial about the potential loss of their friend. Wouldn't we all? But the writing was on the wall. How many times did they escape the hands of their enemies? Perhaps they thought this would continue this way till they would get social security and hang up their sandals. After all they were following a man who did miracles. Jesus is helping them to face his humanity. Death was inevitable.

Jesus reminded them being the son of God meant that he answered only to the Divine One as father. The authority of rulers and elders didn't go beyond courtyards and courthouses. Jesus took his marching orders from something other than political and religious structures. Being willing to do something about it, even if it meant his demise, reflected the love for his neighbors. His message was compelling to anyone who would receive it. This message was bigger than the man Jesus as we know even today. (Wait! I'm having a side epiphany! Maybe, Jesus was the good Samaritan in the parable we know. The hated and rejected one in the story. He put our wounded psyches on his donkey of peace, pays a price for us to be housed, and Spirit is the inn keeper caring for us until he returns and makes things right!) hmm, sorry, that's a message for another time.

Perhaps Jesus knew he was more valuable to humanity, dead than alive. He once said, "It is necessary I leave that the Spirit come." He did nothing but what his father in heaven guided him toward.

Perhaps we should consider this method. Do nothing but what Jesus instructed. Love the Lord with all your heart, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. Otherwise, your self-made righteousness may produce a mega-following.

The very reason Jesus has the following he does today is not because of the way he lived but because of the way he died and rose. We seem to be more protective of his holiness than his authenticity. Instead, we create tribes and cults in our image of Jesus and hold just as tightly to purity gospels like Joshua Harris did.

Just like the Scribes and Elders and Peter wanted to do, many defend their tribes and cults against any threat.

Jesus was a cult buster. Peter didn't want to hear Jesus say he would be rejected, tortured, and die. Peter wanted to fight to defend Jesus and their "church." Jesus didn't want to be a cult leader.

Here are just three of the list of cult traits I've paraphrased from Psych historian Dr. Robert Lifton.

Milieu control. *Control of information and communication and stating everything else is a grave, untrustworthy threat to their existence and belief. Eventually developing control of an individual emotionally and intellectually.*

Jesus asked them what they thought of him. He didn't threaten them to believe. They called him the liberator.

Mystical Manipulation - *The orchestrated elevation of a leader or leaders intentionally to demonstrate their authority and to enhance their capacity "to reinterpret events, scripture, and experiences as he or she wishes."*

Jesus wasn't reinterpreting events. He was calling them back to the origin of events that had been reinterpreted. He reminded them of their intrinsic worth and belonging that was lost in a world of manipulation and control.

Doctrine Over Person

Contrary questioning or experiences are denied or reinterpreted to fit the ideology of the group.

Jesus wasn't about doctrine but about relationship and experience. He opened minds and hearts to the beauty within them—the imago Dei.

When we look at Jesus's humanity, the culture of that time, and the words that he spoke, perhaps we can see what we are up against in our own culture as well.

Jesus was telling people that they were enough. Knowing you are enough produces the desire to live an authentic life. We are called to authenticity. Someone once said, "What if we would stop trying to be like Jesus and focus on living our lives as authentically as Jesus did?"

Religious institutions, businesses, and influencers all struggle with identity. They must maintain the image they've created, or that has been projected on them, and they live in an ongoing image management strategy. Just ask a social media influencer.

Jesus. Did. Not. Do. That.

But we do, and we do it to Jesus. The image of Jesus is defended when he himself did not defend his image. Jesus asked the disciples, “Who do they say that I am?” They listed the many comparisons of spiritual influencers. Jesus asks, “Who do you say that I am?”

Peter answers you are the Messiah, the Liberator. Peter didn’t compare him to the others, and he didn’t declare him the greatest of all time now and forever. Even Jesus told them once, “You will do greater things than I.” Why? Because there is no comparison with the mystery called God that Jesus followed. Imago Dei. We all were made in God's image. *All* were made in God’s image. So, we can say God is enough, right?! Aren’t we enough?

In our culture, the greatest likeness brings in the most dollars, and the more money, the greater the image. College sports has figured this out.

Athletes are now able to negotiate the value of their likeness. It’s called a NIL contract, short for Name, Image, and Likeness. An “NIL” refers to the way athletes can receive compensation using the leverage of their image.

Perhaps this is fine for athletes, but it wasn’t for Jesus or for his church. Here is what author Stephen Mattson, said in Sojourners Magazine in 2014.

“This is what happens when we ignore God — or simply try to make God more *marketable*: Jesus becomes a product. The Gospel becomes a promotional tool. Parishioners become customers. Pastors become celebrities. Sermons become propaganda. Churches become businesses. Denominations become institutions. Faith becomes a religion, which eventually becomes an empire.

Instead of striving to be a place for divine communion where disciples praise and worship, churches become infatuated with *accommodation* — making people comfortable, happy, entertained, safe, and content.

Contrarily, churches can go to the opposite extreme and remove any hint of joy, encouragement, comfort, and inspiration. Instead, they choose to implement fear, guilt, shame, and other abusive tactics to legalistically manipulate people into “loving” God.”

Now, let’s revisit the question Jesus asked the disciples about his NIL. Jesus asked, “Who do they say I am, and what say you?” Peter didn’t answer with an NIL term. He answered, “ You are the Messiah!” You are my liberator.

I read in AA writings somewhere a person in recovery said, “I don’t know who the rescuer is, but I know I was not him. And I may not know who I am, but I know that I am the one who was rescued.”

Maybe we need to use the words of Jesus. “Get thee behind me, Satan,” and any voice that says my identity needs to be defended, protected, or promoted to be enough. *All* are made in the likeness of God!

Amen

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taizé Choir)

Be still, know that I am God

Calm Me, Lord

(Margaret Rizza)

Calm me Lord as you calmed the storm. Still me Lord, keep me from harm.
Let all the tumult within me cease. Enfold me Lord, in your peace.

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)

Healer of our every ill, light of each tomorrow.
Give us peace beyond our fear, and hope beyond our sorrow.
You who know our fears and sadness. Grace us with your peace and gladness.
Spirit of all comfort, fill our hearts. *Refrain*
In the pain and joy beholding, how your grace is still unfolding
Give us all your vision God of love. *Refrain*

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer

(Monastery Choir of St. John of San Francisco)

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.