



TOUCH POINT

“I Call Dibs!” – Touchpoint for October 9, 2024

Mark 10:35-45 The Request of James and John (NRSVUE)

35 Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. “Teacher,” they said, “we want you to do for us whatever we ask.”

36 “What do you want me to do for you?” he asked.

37 They replied, “Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.”

38 “You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said. “Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?”

39 “We can,” they answered.

Jesus said to them, “You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, 40 but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.”

41 When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. 42 Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 43 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Ambition and Misunderstanding: The Request of James and John

I watched all the passion plays. I’d be ok not bearing the same burden Jesus bore. But in all fairness, the disciples didn’t have the advantage of watching Jesus Christ Superstar on the big screen or having boomer parents take them to see Godspell performed live at the Ephesus Community Theater. Jesus had just told them what was to come. He would be arrested, suffer physical punishment, and be murdered.

To the disciple’s credit, they understood there would be a resurrection of some sort. That all would be made right. That in the end, Jesus would win out and send the Spirit. But here they are, potential heirs to their father’s wealthy conglomerate like in the show Succession. Children of the television mogul thinking the empire is up for grabs. The jostling for position is friendly now, but it could get ugly. Jesus says, “Ah no, you don’t!” Like Dikembe Mutombo, he waves the figure and says, “Nah-ah, not in my house!”

A Lesson in Servant Leadership: Jesus’ Response

I want to teach you a word I learned in the cancer infusion center in 2022. My Oncologist was paying a short visit. He grabbed a wheely chair and rolled over to me. Though he was a world-class doctor, it was like he was entering into the Holy of Holies without invitation. Nurses were doing incredible life-saving work. As patients, our infusion chairs were lined up like race cars at the starting gate. Each chair had a drip pole equipped with monitors. As Dr Buresh and I chatted, my monitor began to beep, alerting the nurses about the therapy completion or a monitor glitch. Dr. Buresh hesitantly reached up with his hand to stop the beeping monitor and then slipped down his arm as a nurse hustled to check the LCD message. Dr Buresh sheepishly looked at the more competent nurse and said, “Sorry, I need to remember not to be an ultracrepidarian.” I asked him what that meant, and he said, “It means we need to stay in our lane.” He confessed he had just heard it on a podcast. The formal definition is “a person who criticizes, judges, or gives advice outside their area of expertise.”

Isn't that a great word?! It's a word for our times. Perhaps we are flooded today with more ultracrepidarians than ever. We have Journalists posing as political Scientists. Podcasters posing as climate experts. Systematic theologians thinking they were given the seats James and John were seeking.

Lessons from the Everyday: Humility and Staying in Our Lane

Those two dudes, James and John, had a much better shot at those seats than anyone. But Jesus still gave the Mutombo finger wave to them. "Nah, uh, not in my house!" Mutombo was a center in the NBA and waved that finger high in the air whenever someone drove to the basket, only to get their shot rejected.

Word has it from the bible experts that Jesus was probably furious when they presented their request to sit next to him in heaven. How exasperating it must have been for Jesus. We can judge the two boys from our position, but we have hindsight from watching the passion plays. But honestly, did they think this position was up for dibs by calling, "SHOTGUN!" It's like Jesus waves his finger and says, "Both of you get in the back seat!" "But Jesus, I called dibs!" Yeah, that's what it's about: first come, first serve."

This appears to be the clearest example of Jesus saving his children from themselves.

Jesus assures them that they will share in the baptism. But not this one.

"You do not know what you are asking," he asks. "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They replied, "We are able." Then Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."

This baptism that Jesus referred to was not the baptism John the Baptizer was talking about. This was this understanding of the baptism.

Complete immersion, submersion of calamities and afflictions with which one is quite overwhelmed.

Would these disciples be able to withstand being submerged and overwhelmed like a capsizing ship because their request was granted? I don't know about you, but I couldn't bear this baptism of Jesus. Jesus took the form of a servant and was given the proverbial seat at the right hand of God.

That is why we need not be overwhelmed and submerged in the lives that are indeed our calling. The life we have been given comes with all we need to face each day and celebrate each joy.

Finding Our True "Seat": The Presence of God in the Here and Now

We all have our story. In this moment with James and John, Jesus reveals his story and how it will intertwine with ours.

We are called to live our story, and we are called alone. We are not duplicates, and we cannot be observers sitting idly by, living vicariously through the stories of others. We must live our own story, and it will intertwine with the stories of others.

I just caught up with my dear friend Dallas Demmitt, who is 88 years old. He was telling me pieces of his life story. Our stories intertwined during our years with the Phoenix Suns. He was a player counselor and chaplain, and I was 'The Gorilla.' Last Monday, we chatted about the years that have passed. He, a former

counselor, and I, a mascot, were now two individuals taking our masks off and becoming witnesses to each other's stories.

Perhaps this is why Jesus becomes incensed by two of his favorite disciples, who do not remember the words, "You will do greater things than I." They, like us, will share in the cup and baptism of Christ. It happens to all of us. Our stories will bring their share of submersion and suffering. But we will have our stories intertwined with the story of Jesus and with others on The Way. James and John had no idea what they were asking for, but the other disciples were angry. Perhaps they wanted the same thing, and James and John were calling dibs. God forbid we should value title and status over intimacy with Christ in all the ebb and flow of life. As the psalmist says, "Greater is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere."

With each of our stories comes our own suffering and our own joys. But we share in each other's sufferings and joys. Our reward is not sitting idly by like Jesus' bouncers. It is to experience the now of Spirit's presence, the seat of heavenly places.

So perhaps we can think of salvation as being saved from the foolishness of our inauthentic desires and ambitions and their consequences.

Don't you get exasperated when someone misses the gravity of a moment? This is what is happening with Jesus concerning James and John and the implications of what they are asking for their own lives.

We can't get any closer to God than we are right now. We can only unfold the depths of this incredible intimacy. I don't need to go anywhere. I did have to go to State Farm Stadium to see the famous Rolling Stones perform in person and up close. But to experience Jesus? He said his suffering and death were his cup and baptism, so the comfort of the spirit to take up residence in our stadium or temple—another name for our bodies. Our bodies are a stadium, a temple, for the Holy Spirit! The body will pass, so the body as a temple must mean it's happening right now!

Perhaps this is the residence we should pay attention to and desire to embrace. Not the kingdoms of dominion that seek seats of importance.

James, John, Henry, Gladys, and Burford, you cannot sit in seats that are not assigned to you. The seat you have is the best view in the house for your circumstances.

We took my son Josh to the House of Blues for his 10th birthday. He wanted to see Jars of Clay, David Wilcox, and Burlap to Cashmere. He was so excited, but the venue did not use seating, just standing. He couldn't see a thing. He could only hear and catch glimpses of the band through swaying shoulders. An employee came over and said, "Hey, buddy, come with me." He took us to the band's family section. A level up and ten feet from the corner of the stage. After the concert, we took him to the famous Mel's Diner, and the band members were at a large table. He went to get their autograph, and they invited him to sit with them.

James and John, you have no idea where you will be seated. It's so much better than a place of dominance. Jesus might say to each one of us who came as little children, "Hey buddy, come with me."

The mission of Jesus is to save us from ourselves and our egoistic ambitions for power and popularity.

Here's the formula for the best seat in the house.

“Unless a seed die..”

“Unless you come as a child...”

“Unless you sell all you own for the pearl or buried treasure.”

“Unless you humble yourselves...”

“Unless you take care of the widows...”

“Unless you feed the hungry, clothe the poor...”

“Unless you converse with the elderly...”

“Unless you love one another...” You will settle for spectator seats and eventually become a participant.

Jesus is dying to rise. James and John are looking for positions of status in the afterlife.

Jesus came to the margins of civilization to be with his disciples and call them flourishing examples of redemption, not to collect them as flowerpots to place next to his throne. He became a servant to all.

To share in the cup and baptism of Christ's life, our lives are intertwined in the spectacular and the submerged. The bread and the cup represent the merging of our lives with one seated with us in heavenly places. Right now.

Amen

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taizé Choir)

Be still, know that I am God

Create in Me

(The Concordia Choir)

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence and take not the holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation and uphold me with thy free spirit.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

In the Arms of God

(Tony Alonso, Marty Haugen, Michael Joncas)

Refrain: Come and rest in the arms of God. Leave your worry and fear. Make your home in the heart of God. God will dry every tear. For the burden you carry will fade within God's

care. Come and rest in the arms of God.

1) Gentle is God's way and humble is God's heart. God's love will light the way that leads to peace. Surely you shall see God's goodness and God's grace. Rest now in God's embrace.

Refrain

2) Do not be afraid. God heals the broken heart. Through grief and disbelief God still remains. God and God alone will be your souls true rest. Fall in the arms of God.

Refrain

3) You are not alone, for God is always near. Come place your doubt and fear within God's care. God will give you rest, and soothe your weary soul. Dwell in the heart of God.

Refrain

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer

(Robert Stone, The Cambridge Singers, John Rutter)

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, the guarding of Christ, the guarding of the Spirit be upon you.