



TOUCH POINT

The Powerlessness of Jesus – Touchpoint for January 8, 2025

Luke 3:15-17, 3:21-22 (NRSVUE) The Baptism of Jesus

¹⁵ As the people were filled with expectation and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, ¹⁶ John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water, but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

²¹ Now when all the people were baptized and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, ²² and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

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

Though I have been preaching, teaching and speaking for over thirty years, I am a newbie when it comes to preaching from the liturgical calendar. It has been an interesting discipline that is still evolving for me.

One thing I’ve discovered in the practice is, unless we are simply going through the ritualistic motions of reading and rereading the gospels and the rehashing of old themes, we will be challenged by inconsistencies and omissions in scripture.

For example, I’m disturbed by the lack of information about Jesus from birth to adulthood.

Weeks of Advent writings lead us to a massive crescendo of the Messiah’s birth. It is celebrated with stunning displays of a Savior born. It’s all in the Bible, the God-inspired complete work for Christians, yet nothing of the years of childhood to adulthood.

The Bible survived great odds. “It’s a miracle!” they say. “It’s God wanting his word to come to every generation!” One problem. There is little or no record of Jesus, the cornerstone of our faith, between birth and adulthood. So why would the God of evangelical Christians allow this omission in a book that is supposed to point to Jesus? What about claims of the Bible being everything, all that is needed?

At the end of the 2024 lectionary, we read of the birth of Jesus. At the beginning of the 2025 calendar, we observe the beginning of Jesus’s adult ministry.

We go from the manger to the river in one gigantic leap in the Jesus timeline.

What happens with Jesus between those two defining times? Silence. Nothing but silence. No example, no modeling from the one who says he has suffered every temptation and suffered every hurt. What about adolescent rejection? Emotional heartbreak? Unmet needs? Silence.

Yet we are supposed to relate to Jesus. How can a child, an adolescent, or a young adult relate to the Jesus of the Bible? Was he the last to be picked in a game? Did he react to every situation with sinless calm?

Quite frankly, the only thing that kept me in the Christian tradition following my spiritual crisis questioning the divinity of Jesus, was seeing Jesus as a real human being, a mentor worthy to be followed, not a God demanding allegiance and belief in biblical inerrancy... not a priest who is a Eucharistic table bouncer, not a paper doll dressed up with each generation's trends, to be more relevant. I'm talking about a man who really walked this earth.

I'm not saying Jesus was or wasn't God. I'm saying what we know is that Jesus was a man who saw deeply into the mystical oceans of connection and Divine love without ever claiming to be anything other than human, yet still one with God. Jesus was a man who acknowledged the frailty and resilience of humanity, yet embodied hope for us all, a man whose voice cried, "You belong" to the adulteress, the leper, the thief, and the Pharisee. His love and compassion unmasked their false identities and declared, "You belong." Undeserved, unearned and seemingly out of nowhere, "You belong." You belong, and have always belonged, and will always belong to the Divine Oneness of the Mystery we call God. What you're seeking is knowing this and waking up to it – as it always was, and is and always will be. Even when you didn't know it, you belonged.

As Brennan Manning would say, "The only thing that divides us are those who are aware and those who are unaware."

No wonder Jesus said, "If you seek me, you will find me!" The seeking itself leads to a life of awareness.

Perhaps the lack of information on Jesus's "missing years" is an invitation to us to insert our own lives from toddler through adolescence to young adulthood into the undocumented events of Jesus's missing years. The maturation process is the same as ours, only the events are unique.

Perhaps Jesus enters into our adolescent heartbreak, our theatrical joys, and orphaned and neglected souls accompanied by Spirit until we come to the River Jordan of awareness. It is here that we experience our God-given identities.

Throughout our younger years and into adulthood, we created our own images, our identities. Now, in this moment of clarity, we surrender all we thought we were, and like Jesus, we hear a voice that sounds remarkably like Morgan Freeman declaring to all the world, "This is my child in whom I am well pleased!"

I like to call this the sacred tattoo. We are marked with a tattoo that can never be removed. It is merely covered by all the years of human effort and the deep aching to belong.

In his powerlessness, Jesus let go of everything that he made himself out to be, or thought he might be, or was told he was by others during those "missing" years. I'm sure his parents gave him their points of view, their religious systems, but I suspect he had to let them all go in an effort to make space for a new beginning.

For all our new beginnings, I imagine Jesus might say to us, "It must begin with powerlessness."

If we willingly give ourselves to the reality of our powerlessness, we allow ourselves to be immersed in the authenticity of our humanity.

Jesus's identity is spoken over him by his Father, declared before all those who may say otherwise.

A new beginning is upon us. This is the baptism of fire that only the Spirit of Christ officiates with compassion. It ignites the kindling of our true selves.

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)

Dwell Among Us

(Salt of the Sound)

Keep moving and living and breathing in us
Keeping working and singing and speaking through us
You dwell among us...
With all this life I long to see, more of You and less of me
Lord send Your spirit here to work in us

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer

(The Scottish Festival Singers)

Benediction

May we awaken to our new beginning. A life of authenticity that rocks the world of orthodoxy around us. May we learn to integrate hope and joy into a world paralyzed in the adolescent unease of transformation. May we listen to the voice and the light that guide the movements of our hearts, that we may be a voice and light to others. May we stop coming to Jesus as capable or incapable men and women of God and come as children. May Spirit ignite a fire of new beginning out of our joyous confession of powerlessness. Amen

Sevenfold Amen

(The Emmanuel Quartet)

Amen