



**TOUCH POINT**

## God in a Box Seat – Touchpoint for March 5, 2025

### Isaiah 58:9-12 (The Message) A Full Life in the Emptiest of Places

**6-9** “If you get rid of unfair practices, quit blaming victims, quit gossiping about other people’s sins,

If you are generous with the hungry and start giving yourselves to the down-and-out,  
Your lives will begin to glow in the darkness, your shadowed lives will be bathed in sunlight.  
I will always show you where to go.

I’ll give you a full life in the emptiest of places—firm muscles, strong bones.  
You’ll be like a well-watered garden, a gurgling spring that never runs dry.  
You’ll use the old rubble of past lives to build anew, rebuild the foundations from out of your past.  
You’ll be known as those who can fix anything, restore old ruins, rebuild and renovate, make the community livable again.

### Matthew 6:1-6 (The Message) The World is Not a Stage

**6** “Be especially careful when you are trying to be good so that you don’t make a performance out of it. It might be good theater, but the God who made you won’t be applauding.

<sup>2-4</sup> “When you do something for someone else, don’t call attention to yourself. You’ve seen them in action, I’m sure— ‘playactors’ I call them—treating prayer meeting and street corner alike as a stage, acting compassionate as long as someone is watching, playing to the crowds. They get applause, true, but that’s all they get. When you help someone out, don’t think about how it looks. Just do it—quietly and unobtrusively. That is the way your God, who conceived you in love, working behind the scenes, helps you out.

<sup>5</sup> “And when you come before God, don’t turn that into a theatrical production either. All these people making a regular show out of their prayers, hoping for fifteen minutes of fame! Do you think God sits in a box seat?

<sup>6</sup> “Here’s what I want you to do: Find a quiet, secluded place so you won’t be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his grace.

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

“Do you think God is in a box seat?”

God in a Box Seat?

What a brilliant translation Eugene Peterson suggests in *The Message*: “Do you think God is in a box seat?”

According to Matthew’s gospel, Jesus is redirecting our outward performances by saying:

“And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward.”

Jesus inviting us to experience inward intimacy with God rather than stagey performances.

Many of our days are spent worrying about what other people think and do. It's natural for us to want to control the narrative. At the same time, we seek affirmation and validation for our feelings, opinions, and work. Naturally, this desire to be heard and seen seeps into spiritual piety. Peterson translates this public piety by asking, "You think God is sitting in a box seat?" Ouch! I often give God the best seat in my house for my egoistic performances.

It can ruin relationships. I've had what I call an "applause addiction." These performances come with expectations. We are like children shouting to their parents, "Look at me, look at me!" Only, as adults, it becomes, "Love me, hear me, see me!" I think when we make public displays with our words and deeds, we are not participating in God's work—we are spectators.

In this life, there are spectators and participants. So it stands to reason that, in the kingdom of God, there are also participants and spectators. We are called to participate in God's divine nature, not the other way around.

When I go to a basketball game, I am one of thousands sitting in the stands. Though I am just a spectator, I seem to think I know more than the officials, the coach, and the players—what calls should be made and who should take the last shot. I'm not alone. Like a Roman coliseum, the wisdom of the crowd is shouted.

But who are the participants? They are the ones sitting on the bench and the five on the court. They have journeyed intimately with their coach and teammates, both in season and off. They've learned from their failures and celebrated their successes. The coach, like a conductor, reminds his players to keep their eyes on him in the middle of the hostile noise. The bond between coach and player deepens through the hard times.

Spectators live and die with the outcomes, often making public spectacles of themselves. Participants, however, grow in intimacy with their coach and teammates. They are taught to let go of outcomes and focus on the task at hand. In other words, they trust the coach's process—even in the emptiest of places, as Peterson paraphrases in Matthew.

God's desire is to coach us into a new life that bursts onto the world's scene with wisdom and compassion. It originates from within us—in the stillness, in the quiet. It takes place in season and off, when nobody else is watching.

Playing for performance alone is what they call playing "hero ball." The player's actions make the coach an ineffective spectator. The coach is on the bench—or in a box seat—while we make fools of ourselves. The game is won or lost based on that one player's performance.

The invitation of God is clear. Though your outer circumstances may appear bleak, do not do as others who pray on street corners for all to see, and do not play hero ball with your outward cries and futile words of worry.

The invitation is to enter the paradox of the spiritual life. We let go of the outcomes of our doings. We die to our egos. Even if they appear to be right, they are nothing without God. Our victory is birthed from death—just like the beginning of the Lenten season.

This season, practice the paradox of dying to live.

From the ashes and from the dust. Many of the same people who waved palm fronds for Jesus—symbolizing peace—would later call for his crucifixion. Were they joining with Jesus in the palm fronds of peace or victory? Were they spectators or participants?

Ancient Greeks presented palm branches to athletes as a sign of victory. The spiritual life calls for our personal victorious palm fronds to be burned. The ashes of our ego become the place of Christ's resurrection—in us, for us, and for the world around us.

Today is Ash Wednesday.

May we allow the ashes of our past indulgences and religious piety to create space for the desires of God.

Then, the desire of God fills our lives, and we can join the work of our brother Jesus, who said:

“The spirit of the Lord is upon me, to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind. To set at liberty those who are oppressed and proclaim this the day of the Lord!”

This is the desire of God.

Let us pause for a moment and ask: *God, who am I that You would invite me to take part in Your divine nature, in the healing and salvation of myself and the world?*

Let us begin this Lenten season with a pause to hear the participatory invitation of God's presence.

Feel the Spirit's healing waters cool the heat of our displeasure and discomfort.

The box seat is now vacant. God takes center stage in our hearts and is working out the world's salvation through my salvation, in this moment.

**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)*

### **See Him**

(Keith Duke)

**See him...** 1) Silent and lifeless 2) Alone and forlorn  
3) Broken and helpless... crowned with a garland of thorns  
4) As son and as brother 5) Related to all  
6) Through the grief of a mother... hurting the most of all  
7) As healer and teacher 8) As helper and friend  
9) As prophet and preacher... Ignore Him? I doubt if you can

### **The Meal**

### **The Lord's Prayer**

*("Our Father," Taizé Reflections)*

### **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.

**Amen**