



TOUCH POINT

Thieving Jesus – TouchPoint for December 2, 2020.

2 Peter 3:8-13 (NRSV). ⁸ But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.

¹¹ Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, ¹² waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? ¹³ But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.

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

“The day of the Lord will come like a thief” And ... “We wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.”

It's getting into the Christmas season out there. Some decorations have been up since before Halloween. And it isn't just Santa who's making a list and checking it twice. People everywhere are writing out their Christmas list for more of the things they want... for more of the things they want. After all, that is the point of Christmas, to receive gifts and walk away with more than you started after the season is over.

So, it's kind of peculiar that our passage from II Peter speaks of the day of the Lord coming “like a thief in the night.” A thief?! I always thought God came to give me more. Make all things I want possible. Why is God being compared to a thief? Thieves arrive unexpectedly. It's always a surprise and a shock. I thought God could be controlled with a few magic words and an Abra Cadabra prayer.

What is it the Mystery wants to take from us? What is it the Divine wants to steal away? Could it be that God is first a God of subtraction rather than addition? Well that would certainly be unexpected and a surprise.

Is it possible, that in this pre-Christmas season – Advent as it is known in the liturgical world – is it possible to be preparing for something different than the world's view of Christmas? Preparing for something other than getting ‘more’?

If Jesus is ‘grace incarnate,’ how is it possible to prepare for that? When I think back on my life, grace has always come unexpectedly. It is always a surprise. It sneaks up on me and catches me unaware. It often comes from the most unlikely people and places. And it doesn't just steal my breath away, it kind of shakes the foundations of my reward and punishment world.

Grace steals something. Deep, at a foundational level. It runs off with my addictions to be right, to be in control, and to be enough.

It leaves me with less, while giving me so much more.

It transforms me. Changes life. My outlook, my perspective, my present.

Perhaps this is what our passage is referring to when it says:

“We wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.”

The coming of the Mystery into flesh and this world is not about getting us out of this world. God doesn't need to come to earth to help us escape earth. What a ridiculous theology we have created. "God needs to come to earth so we can leave this earth and go to heaven." Why doesn't God just wait until we die and take us then?

Christianity has so often made the mistake of thinking that it can only build up the next life by tearing down this one.

But the Christmas story, the incarnation story, is about a God who so loves this world, is so invested in this world, that God becomes it. God takes it on God's very self.

"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us ... full of grace and truth."

That's why I never got those billboards that were supposedly put up by Christians that said, "**Don't make me come down there! Signed, God.**" Perhaps they were trying to be funny, because they weren't being biblical or theological.

"Don't make me come down there! Signed, God."

PLEASE!!!!

God is always coming down here. God has always wanted to be down here. From God's walking in the garden to be with Adam and Eve. To the incarnation and Jesus' birth. To the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the disciples here on earth. To the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven and setting up residence on earth in the book of Revelation.

As Revelation states, *"God's dwelling place is with humanity, and God will live with them."*

"Don't make me come down there?!?!?! Signed God."

REALLY!!! I wish people who called themselves Christian would just read the bible sometimes, before they speak, or post billboards. You see, God is not so much interested in getting retribution on this world as God is interested in restoring it.

"We wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home."

N.T. Wright says it well, when he writes:

"The followers of Jesus... saw 'heaven' and 'earth'— God's space and ours, if you like - as the twin halves of God's good creation. Rather than rescuing people from the latter in order to reach the former, the creator God would finally bring heaven and earth together in a great act of new creation, completing the original creative purpose by healing the entire cosmos of its ancient ills."

To put it another way ... Just as nighttime and daylight are all part of one day, so heaven and earth are all part of one creation. And not two separate entities.

Or, in other words, Christians do not seek to run away from this world, but run into it. With medicine and balm for its healing.

And maybe what we need to be bringing into this world is something less, not something more. And what I mean by that, is that maybe what we first need to bring to this world is a confrontation with our need for "more," for accumulation, for consumption. To speak a word of subtraction rather than addition.

Now I know that this will not sit well with the “prosperity gospel” crowd. But if Jesus is like a thief, and he’s staking out our lives and casing the joint, what is it he is trying to steal away?

Nadia Bolz-Weber puts it well:

“This holy thief wants to steal from us, and maybe that is literal and metaphoric at the same time. Perhaps, during Advent, a season with pornographic levels of consumption in which our credit card debts rise and our waistbands expand, the idea that Jesus wants to break in and jack some of our stuff is really good news. There’s just a whole lot of crap in my house – again both literally and metaphorically – that I could well do without.”

She goes on to suggest that, **“... maybe we should start making Advent lists --- they’d be like Christmas lists, but instead of listing things we want Santa to bring us, we could write down things we want Christ to break in and take from us. In the hopes he could pickpocket the junk in our houses, or abscond with our self-loathing or resentment ... maybe break in in the middle of the night and take off with our compulsive eating or our love of money.”**

So perhaps this Advent, it is time to pray for the thief to come. To do some Spring cleaning as Winter descends. To clear out the junk from our lives that keeps us from being a Mary to the world. A bearer of the Christ.

Addition by subtraction. A dying in order to be born anew. A losing of one’s life in order to be found, by grace.

An Advent prayer unlike any we may have prayed before,

“Come, thief Jesus. Steal away all that keeps us from you. Then steal our hearts as well. So that righteousness and heaven are at home in them and on this earth.”

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert
Opening Songs

Be Still

Be Still, know that I am God

Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel

O, Come, O, Come Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel. That mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear. Rejoice, Rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee O Israel.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Of the Father's Love Begotten

Of the Father's love begotten, Ere the worlds began to be, He is Alpha and Omega,
He the source, the ending He. Of the things that are, that have been,
And that future years shall see, Evermore and evermore!

O that birth forever blessed, When the virgin, full of grace,
By the Spirit blessed conceiving, Bore the Savior of our race; And the Babe, the world's Redeemer,
First revealed His sacred face, evermore and evermore!

Let the heights of heaven adore Him; Angel hosts, His praises sing; Powers, dominions, bow before Him, and extol our God and King! Let no tongue on earth be silent, Every voice in concert ring, Evermore and evermore!

Christ, to You with God the Father, Spirit blessed eternally, Hymn and chant and high thanksgiving, And unending praises be: Honor, glory, and dominion, And eternal victory, Evermore and evermore! Amen.

The Meal

Lo, How a Rose E're Blooming

Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming. From tender stem has sprung! Of Jesse's lineage coming, As those of old have sung. It came, a blossom bright, Amid the cold of winter, When half spent was the night.

Isaiah 'twas foretold it, The Rose I have in mind; With Mary we behold it, The virgin mother kind. To show God's love aright, She bore to us a Savior, When half spent was the night.

This Flow'r, whose fragrance tender. With sweetness fills the air, Dispels with glorious splendor The darkness everywhere. It came, a blossom bright, Amid the cold of winter, When half spent was the night.

Benediction

For Unto Us a Child Is Born

For unto us a child is born, Unto us a son is given. And the government shall be upon his shoulder. And his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

