



TOUCH POINT

Jesus at the Waffle House – Touchpoint for November 29, 2023

Mark 13:24-37 (NRSVUE) The Coming of the Son of Man

²⁴ “But in those days, after that suffering,
the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light,

²⁵ and the stars will be falling from heaven,
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

²⁶ “Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory. ²⁷ Then he will send out the angels and gather the^[a] elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

The Lesson of the Fig Tree

²⁸ “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he^[b] is near, at the very gates. ³⁰ Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. ³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

The Necessity for Watchfulness

³² “But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Beware, keep alert,^[c] for you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴ It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. ³⁵ Therefore, keep awake, for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening or at midnight or at cockcrow or at dawn, ³⁶ or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. ³⁷ And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

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

Jews in the days of Jesus anticipated a calamitous period filled with earthquakes, hatred, wars, distrust, and climate change and... well, everything that’s happening now. According to theologian William Barclay there was a time between the Old and New Testaments when Jews knew no freedom. The literature of this period was called *apokalupsis*, which means the unveiling. It was based upon visions and dreams. Barclay says, “...all these books were dreams and visions. They were attempts to paint the unpaintable and to speak the unspeakable. They were poetry, not prose. They were visions, not science. They were dreams, not history. They were never meant to be taken prosaically as maps of the future and timetables of events to come. These books were dreams and visions of what would happen when the day of the Lord came and in the terrible time immediately before it. They continued to use the Old Testament imagery, and to supplement it with new details.” Jews would understand this imagery Jesus was using.

There are many interpretations of the second coming of Christ, literal and symbolic. I have never felt on sturdy ground with any interpretation presented. I decided to look at the Second Coming relevance for our lives in the here and now.

Here's what Richard Rohr says about the Second Coming,

Whenever the material and the spiritual coincide, there is the Christ. Jesus fully accepted that human-divine identity and walked it into history. Henceforth, the Christ "comes again" whenever we can see the spiritual and the material coexisting, in any moment, in any event, and in any person. All matter reveals Spirit, and Spirit needs matter to "show itself"! I believe "the Second Coming of Christ" happens whenever and wherever we allow this to be utterly true for us. This is how God continually breaks into history—even before the first Stone Age, humans stood in awe and wonder, gazing at the stars. -Richard Rohr

For me, the importance of the passages is the call to stay awake. It has more relevance to me these days than when we shouted, "Maranatha, come Lord Jesus!", after reading *The Late Great Planet Earth*, a book about the end times.

In my early thirties I battled the idea of predestination. I will not get into the details of my journey or my present understanding, but I will tell you that after having a spiritual crisis over it, I threw up my hands and cried, "Uncle!" I decided to take a break from the God of the Bible and put the book on the shelf. The Bible had been a filter of belief my entire adult life. I prayed, "God Reveal yourself to me as if for the very first time." In the year following, I found myself in charge of my life and God was a silent partner. Oddly, I felt more confidence, and I was happier than I'd ever been.

Then late in the year of my separation from the Bible, I went through financial and family crises I would not wish on anyone. The desperation suffocated any breath of hope. I was a divorced dad who raised his daughters as primary custodian for ten years, but never changed legal custody to myself. According to the court, I was behind in child support by \$98,000. They came to collect. My avoidance of important legal matters was coming back to haunt me. I was a *nothing* in the world's eyes, as far as I was concerned. A friend told me her cousin who faced similar circumstances was in town, a person who may have helpful advice or encouragement. I was willing to listen to anyone who might give me a reason for hope.

I drove to a resort in Litchfield Park on the outskirts of Phoenix where this person was staying. We sat and talked, and I didn't hear a word he was saying. I sat with monkey mind, swinging from thought to thought. Then in conclusion he said, "I think I have a message for you from God. I think God is saying for you to let him love you." Really? I thought. That's it?

I left and sat in my car in the resort parking lot. I dipped into my charismatic past and prayed "God, please show me a sign that you care. That everything is gonna be alright." Staring into darkness, I waited for a sign to appear; a light, an angel, a neon bird – I'd take anything. But there was nothing. I drove off thinking I'm an idiot. On my way home I stopped at a waffle house. It was midnight and I didn't want to go home. I took my Franklin Day Planner in with me to look busy and not like a lonely, pathetic loser. I scribbled in it with furrowed brow.

When I went to pay, I set my planner on the register. A deep gruff voice behind me shouted, "HEY!" I turned around and saw a man with a Vietnam veterans cap sitting in a wheelchair. He had no legs. Tube socks were covering his stumps. I said, "Yes?" He pointed to the planner and asked, "What's that?" I said, "It's my day planner, why?" The vet said, "I thought it might be a Bible. I contracted Agent Orange and found out I have cancer and have a year to live. Wondered if it's worth waiting for." I told him I would be right back. I went home, dug through my boxes, found my Bible and grabbed some cash and a coat. I think this is my sign! I went

back to the waffle house, sat at his table and gave him my Bible, the coat (cause that seemed biblical) and the only money I had to my name.

“Sir,” I said, “you have no idea what I’ve gone through to get you this message. God just wants you to let him love you.” Then I said, “Now you have a message for me.” He said, “I do?” I told him, “Yes, out of all your experience, you have wisdom for me right now, please tell me.” He looked confused and under pressure as he grasped for something to say. Then finally he said, “A kind word will go a long way.” Excitedly, I pressed him. “Aaand?” He replied, “A kind word will go a long way, but a kind word and a gun will go a lot further.” Now dejected, I managed, “I’m sorry to have bothered you, Sir. Have a good morning.” I left in worse shape for rekindling faith and hope. What made me think that I was going to see a sign?

As I was driving home, a scripture entered my mind and it was like Christ breaking through! “In as much as you have done this unto the least of these, you have done it unto me.” That was Jesus! I’d been asleep all along. Conscious, but asleep.

I don't believe that God works in mysterious ways. *I believe, our mysterious God works in familiar ways; we just need to open our eyes.* That's what it means to experience the second coming of Christ. For me, it is to be able to see Christ in others. Christ in this moment, where matter and spiritual connect. For me, it's not what we believe about the future that matters, it's how we experience the Second Coming of Christ breaking through.

Stay awake!

Amen.

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taize Choir, Remember Me)

Be still, know that I am God

You Lord Are in this Place

(Keith Duke)

You Lord are in 1)...this place.
2)...my heart. 3)...my mind. 4)...my life.
Your presence fills it.
Your presence is peace.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Lead Me, Lord

(Discovery Singers)

Lead me, Lord. Lead me in thy righteousness.
Make thy way plain before my face.
For it is thou, Lord, thou Lord only, that makest me to dwell in safety.

The Meal

Lord's Prayer

(Robert Stone, The Cambridge Singers, John Rutter)

Benediction

The Lord Bless You and Keep You

(National Lutheran Choir, Peter C. Lukin)

The Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord lift his countenance upon you.
And give you peace....
The Lord make his face to shine upon you.
And be gracious unto you.
The Lord be gracious unto you. Amen