

**"All Will Be Disclosed"**  
**2 Peter 3:8-15a**  
**Andrew Foster Connors**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent**  
**December 10, 2017**

Last week Isaiah cried out to God to tear open the heavens and come and save us. This week 2 Peter writes to a people who seem to be losing faith that God will ever come. It's one thing to believe in the second coming of Christ a few weeks or even a few years after you've seen him walking around with the wounds in his hands. It's easier to believe in God's power when you've seen evidence of it right in front of you. When the loaves and fishes keep multiplying before your eyes, the dead are raised, the sick are healed, the Spirit lights up the church like tongues of fire. But when it's been 3 generations under empire, when Caesar's shameless abuses of power go unchecked, when the suffering of some of us reaches levels that no one should have to endure, the church starts to wonder, is Christ ever going to come?

That's the way the biblical scholars tell it. 2 Peter is written to a church losing faith in the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ. But I wonder if that faith was mostly gone by the time the letter was written. It certainly seems gone in the church today. We might sing or say "Come, Lord Jesus," but many of us have already decided that the future is up to us to create. Maybe we should jettison the entire season of Advent altogether. There's no use in cultivating patient endurance or the discipline of waiting if it all depends on us.

If the choice is between believing that Jesus is literally going to ride in on a cloud from the troposphere or believing that we're on our own, I know what most of us have already chosen.

Truthfully, I don't care all that much about losing the literalist notions of the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming. Jesus has already told us we won't know the hour and even the people who love Christ the most have the hardest time recognizing Christ when she comes. If there's one thing that Israel and the Church have in common we fail to see God in the stranger, we don't expect to see God wrapped in swaddling clothes, we don't anticipate God's unusual intrusions in our world. The minute we enforce literalist understandings of how and when God is with us is the moment we betray our lack of faith in the God who confounds our expectations. No, I don't care all that much about losing the literalist notions of the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming. What I care about losing is the confidence that evildoers will be held accountable, losing the belief that no one is above the law, losing the conviction that the moral arc of the universe bends toward justice. Losing the confidence that God isn't dead.

It's easy to lose that confidence when the President of the United States is "a narcissistic sexual harasser and a routine liar...who asks his own party to become the party of Roy Moore, the party of bigotry, alleged sexual harassment and child assault."<sup>1</sup> And those aren't my words. You know things are really bad when those

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<sup>1</sup> David Brooks, "The G.O.P. is Rotting," *The New York Times*, December 7, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/07/opinion/the-gop-is-rotting.html>.

words are used by the centrist conservative columnist David Brooks. It's easy to lose confidence when what is real is called fake and what's fake is called truth. It's easy to lose that confidence when your city seems to unravel at its seams and no one is on the horizon, coming to save. It's easy to lose confidence when someone close to you is swept away well before what we think is fair or just. It's easy to lose that confidence.

And once that confidence is gone – confidence that justice will prevail, confidence that might won't conquer right, confidence that good will overcome evil, confidence that God is involved in our world and in our lives – once that confidence is gone, so is our hope.

Maybe that's what the writer of 2 Peter is so worried about – losing the very belief that justice isn't just a word that gets to be defined by whoever holds power, that what is good and right isn't completely relative, that human beings are rooted in something deeper than our capacity to kill or destroy, that even when the world seems to lose all of its light, there is still a holy spark waiting for its time to catch flame.

Don't give up on that confidence. Don't give up on that hope. Don't give up on the truth. Keep praying, "come Lord Jesus." Keeping pray, "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down." Pray fervently for Christ to come. Pray fervently for God to enter the scene. Pray fervently and act fervently believing that Christ is coming soon.

That's what I would say if I were the writer of 2 Peter.

But 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter doesn't say that. 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter says almost the opposite. The real blessing isn't that God is coming soon. The blessing is that the Lord hasn't yet returned. That's what the book says. "The Lord is not slow about the promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance." It's like the writer is saying, don't be disappointed that God hasn't returned yet. God's delay is for your own benefit. If God returned today, we'd all have some explaining to do.

We're not ready for God's return. If the Lord came back today, we'd all be exposed for our failures to do what's right, our failure to live in response to God's call. We know what God is looking for in our world – a neighborly ethic in our private and public lives – a world arranged like this communion table – where all have enough. The world doesn't reflect that yet and it's our fault. We're not ready to be judged.

The New York Times recently published an exposé on Harvey Weinstein's multiple assaults, intimidations, and harassment of women across decades.<sup>2</sup> As Weinstein's power and money grew so did his tentacles of intimidation. What shocked me about the piece wasn't so much about Weinstein's crimes – those have been reported now for weeks. What interested me is all the people – employees, associates, clients, investors, friends – male and female – some with lots of power, some with little, who failed in sometimes small, sometimes more significant ways to intervene. Some cooperated because they hoped to advance in their careers. Others

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<sup>2</sup> "Weinstein's Complicity Machine," Megan Twohey, Jodi Kantor, Susan Dominus, Jim Rutenberg, and Steve Eder, *The New York Times*, December 6, 2017.

cooperated because they feared losing a career, or a future. The Weinstein story makes it clear that the line between victim and accomplice can sometimes get blurry. “You become more and more aware of everything going on,” one of Weinstein’s assistants told the Times, “then you realize what it is you’re cleaning up, and you don’t ever want to tell anyone that — friends, family, my parents — what kind of job this is.” Until it all comes crashing down and there is a shocking clarity about the costs of doing less than what contributes toward justice, doing less than looking out for the vulnerable, doing less than what is right.

“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.” One way or another it will all be disclosed. That’s the conviction of 2<sup>nd</sup> coming theology. The conviction that we will be held accountable for our lives.

Given that truth, how are you going to live your life today? How are you going to make things right in a world that wants you to adopt its narcissistic, lying ways? What are you going to do in your workplace or your school, or your house when injustice appears before you and you have to make a decision about whether to do what’s right or what’s expedient?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrestled with these questions ten years after Hitler’s rise to power when evil had, in his words, “thrown all ethical concepts into confusion.”<sup>3</sup> The “reasonable person” would not be capable of resisting the evil that had overtaken Germany, he wrote. People who think they can resist evil with their reason are so naïve about the reality of power that they “withdraw in resignation” or “fall victim to the stronger.” The fanatic will fail as well. “The fanatic believes he can meet the power of evil with the purity of a principle,” Bonhoeffer wrote, “but like a bull in the arena, he attacks the red cape rather than the person carrying it out, grows tired, and suffers defeat.” The person of conscience won’t do it, either. “The seductive disguises by which evil approaches her makes her conscience fearful and unsure...until she deceives her own conscience in order not to despair.” The person of duty can’t stand firm. “The man of duty,” he wrote, “will in the end have to do his duty also to the devil.” And the virtuous person won’t be able to stand firm either. That person “can remain undefiled...only by deceiving herself. In everything she does, that which she fails to do will leave her no peace. She will either perish from that restlessness or turn into the most hypocritical of all.”

So who can stand firm in such a time as this? “Only the one,” Bonhoeffer wrote, “whose ultimate standard is not his reason, his principles, conscience freedom, or virtue; only the one who is prepared to sacrifice all of these when, in faith and in relationship to God alone, he is called to obedient and responsible action. Such a person is the responsible one, whose life is to be nothing but a response to God’s question and call.”

On the day of the coming of the Lord the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed. This is good news to those who have suffered injustice among us. It is good news to the poor who continue to be ignored. It is good news to those

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<sup>3</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *After Ten Years: An Account at the Turn of the Year 1942-1943*, translation by Barbara and Martin Rumscheidt, edited by Victoria J. Barnett, (Fortress Press), 2017, pp. 18-20.

who live under the threat of violence in our city or grieve the loss of loved ones to the streets. It is good news to victims of harassment whose stories have not yet been vindicated. It is good news for the saints of Mother Emmanuel Church and their families, and for so many others. It is also good news for their white supremacist killer, just as it's good news for Harvey Weinstein and people like him, for the rich who don't understand the dangers of wealth, and for those in our city who have pulled the triggers. God wants us all to be whole. The real question in Advent, not just this season, but in the Advent of God's final justice is how are you going to live your life today?

Yesterday I preached the installation service for the Rev. Glenna Huber former co-chair of BUILD who is now the rector of the Church of the Epiphany Episcopal parish in the heart of Washington, DC. At the reception an Episcopal priest, a young woman, introduced herself and asked about a member of our community. She used to work with this person together in a major institution of our city. She was a development director, young, little experience. He was her boss, the person responsible for raising money for the institution. One day the two of them went to a lunch with a potential major donor. Small talk with the potential donor turned flirtatious and then inappropriate, she told me. And then her colleague and mentor, a man probably twice her age, turned to her and said, "Let's leave. This is over." "This was long before #metoo," she told me, "and I've never forgotten it. He walked away from money to do what was right."

Who can stand firm in such a time as this? Only the responsible one, whose life is to be nothing but a response to God's question and call. On the day of the coming of the Lord the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed. Given that truth, how are you going to live your life today?