

Seeing the Future

Luke 21: 5-19

Slide One: Not One Stone

“As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down. They asked him, “Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?”

Slide 2: Next Big Thing

The future: all of us hope to have it, but what we all have in common is that we cannot know what it is. Knowing the future is beyond our grasp, and yet, because we are human, we are always considering the future by planning it, looking forward to it, or fearing it. Despite our best intentions, often even in our present moment, we are mostly thinking about something we have to do later or need to plan for. Even though this present moment is the only one we

ever have promised to us at any moment in time, we still often live for the future that may be, at least we hope it will.

This fascination of the future is I think quite natural. If we only knew the future, we might say, we could stop something or change something. But, would we? What did Nostradamus mean by his predictions, and if a fortune teller actually told me my future, would it happen as told, or do I have some control over what happens? Do we live lives of destiny or of choosing? Or, is there something of both, for as Christians, we pray for direction from God, who says over and over again in scripture that there are plans for us and that we should not be afraid.

Slide 3: Philip K. Dick

Seeing the future: would you want to? As a kid, I think I read absolutely every single Phillip K. Dick novella there was. He was a science fiction novelist who

actually wrote under an oddly named genre called “paranoid fiction”. I suppose he was, paranoid, that is; and his life was clearly a troubled one; and in just about all his books, it’s clear he had an obsession about the future, about destiny, and about free will. The overarching theme in his writing seems to truly wonder if human beings really have the free will we all believe we do. Is it fate, is it free will, is it something else?

One of Phillip K. Dick’s novella is called *The Golden Man*. A movie based upon this same title is called *NEXT*. In the movie, a man named Cris, has the ability to see two minutes into his future at any time. He is not able to see anyone else’s future, only his own for two minutes ahead. He can’t see days, years, or make predictions of the end of the world, but he can tell you two minutes and what will happen to him in those two minutes.

How he deals with this ability is interesting, as he considers each step and how his actions can change based upon what he sees, leaving a different result each time. If you are actually interested in the debate about free will and fate, this is a good movie to watch.

And yet, would we want that ability? Wouldn’t it be amazing if we could just know a month from now, even if just for ourselves? Just think! If we could see the future, the words would never have been spoken during the maiden voyage of the Titanic, “God himself couldn’t sink her!” Or, would it be good for us to have this knowledge?

Slide 4: Warning This sign

In our Gospel reading, the disciples are pointing to the beautiful temple in Jerusalem that had just been finished after years and years of building. It is a beautiful sight to behold, to see what amazing things

humans are capable of building.

But, then Jesus gives them just a glimpse of the future and tells them that the temple they are so impressed with is soon to be destroyed forever. And, they want to know how it will take place. To the people of those days, it would be like Jesus saying that Notre Dame Cathedral would burn in a fire or that a massive hurricane would destroy the Bahamas. Certainly the disciples would want to know more about their temple being destroyed. We certainly would want that knowledge...wouldn't we? Would having that knowledge actually be helpful?

Slide 5: Future

There is a story which I once heard on NPR about a family who faced this dilemma, the dilemma of knowing a little piece of their future. The story begins with a woman who way back as a divorced

Mom had the care of her four boys. Two of her boys became doctors, one owned his own business, and the youngest son was in graduate school.

For some unknown reason, at age 50, the oldest son, a noted doctor, suddenly became ill. The diagnosis was elusive and nothing seemed to make sense. Those several months of trying to figure things out were absolutely agonizing as this man grew increasingly worse and there were no answers.

Finally, physicians and researchers discovered an extremely rare genetic condition that causes frontal lobe dementia. The brain simply begins to self-destruct, not slowly, but almost immediately. Just months after the diagnosis, this first son dies.

This is a very complex story to tell adequately, but the short of it is that all three remaining sons may or may not have the gene of this disease but there now is a

test to see if they have the genetic marker for it. One of the sons did the genetic test while the other two chose not to. The genetic test for the one son was negative.

Would you want to know the future if you were one of the remaining family members? Would you get tested for the disease, knowing that if you had the gene, you could contract it? And, if the physician, who died from the disease, knew that he would suddenly die at age fifty, would that have changed who he was? Maybe you would want to know. Maybe you would not want to know. Each person may decide differently.

The fact that we have this amazing science to warn us today about such things as genetic breast cancer, Alzheimers, Huntingtons, and other such diseases – this contains within it both gift and challenge, perhaps even leaning towards a future when all of us may be privy to such risks for our

loved ones. We may catch some glimpse of our future.

Slide 6: Stand Up Straight

You might not think this, but Jesus words for us today do have something to do with how we handle our present lives, and how we look at our futures, too, especially when it comes to our purpose of life, as a community and as individuals. We all have a purpose in this life, a unique calling God has given us through our baptisms. So, in today's Gospel reading, Jesus is reminding us that the world, history, and our lives are rooted in a source of all being, in God. And, as well as having a source of life, that history, and all people, also have a purpose.

Slide 7: Human Freedom

Now, this is up and against a great deal of the modern world view that everything happens by chance. This view of chance even suggests that creation emerged from nowhere for no particular reason and that

it was a great cosmic accident. With a view like this, we can assume then that our lives are all the same. We, each of us were simply dealt a deck of cards and that we have very little to say about how that plays out.

Or, what I think is even more problematic, that everything we are and everything we do is because of fate. There are a lot of people who love fate. Just listen to the language of some of the love stories on the Hallmark Channel – they were fated to meet each other? Where in the world is free will if it's fate? Why bother trying to change anything?

In contrast to this, Jesus is actually pointing to an end of history and declares that the future not only holds a time of hope and glory, but a time of reckoning. Theologians call this the Eschaton, which is a word that simply means the end. As the prophet Malachi said, "See, the day is surely coming...like a burning

oven." Knowing this, we would, like the disciples, want to ask the burning questions: "When will this happen and is there a way I can know it is upon us?"

Yet, it is God who is ultimately in the know of the beginning and also of the end or all things, and not unlike the beginning; the end will also include times of personal trial, difficulty, and suffering, times where our free choice and free will play a part.

Slide 8: This is the...

And, in this very drastic word for us in Luke, Jesus says quite simply, you have a purpose and a beautiful faith life within all of that. Don't listen to the people who think they have all the answers! Don't be swayed by these false gods and prophets who promise you a certain safety and answer to it all! Don't wonder how it will happen! Just know that God will be with you, give you the words and life you need, and your endurance and

perseverance will show you over and over again a God of love, who says that despite anything the future may bring, Christ is with you in hope.

Furthermore, even though God is ultimately in the know of the end of all things, God does grant us free will, which can change how we act and behave towards any given stimuli. We have purpose not only in God's purpose for us, but in the gift God has given us in choosing how our lives will play out in faith, in life, and even in our deaths.

The purpose of our living is directly related to the purpose of God's ultimate plans for us. And, that purpose remains in every age and in every Christian life when we are under duress. We are to remain rooted in faith and take opportunity to share that faith in the midst of our trials.

"By endurance," Jesus says, "You will gain your souls."

Ok, so we don't know the future, but we can trust that even in the worst of what could come, Christ will give us what we need. As the wonderful hymn we are about to sing proclaims:

Slide 9: "One the light..."

"One the light of God's own presence on the ransomed people shed, chasing far the gloom and terror, bright'ning all the path we tread. One the object of our journey, one the faith which never tires, one the earnest looking forward, one the hope our God inspires."

Amen.