

AColyte

April 2024

A Journal of Faith, Doubt, and Other Things
at Austin College



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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN...

April 2024

*Don't worry about a thing.
Every little thing is gonna be alright.
--Bob Marley*

*Put love above everything else
And the rest will take care of itself.
--Webb Wilder*

I don't know if you've heard, but there will be a solar eclipse in our part of the world on Monday April 8.

AC Physics Professor David Whelan has been borderline giddy for several weeks now in preparation for that event.

And for good reason.

In his email to the campus last week, Dr. Whelan said "this is the most important astronomical event to occur in North Texas in our lifetime."

Dr. Whelan and the Austin College Society of Physics Students have planned eclipse-related programming on the campus Monday afternoon,

Here's the poster they've prepared:

AClipse
Solar Eclipse Celebration
CATCH THE 'ROO VIEW

4.8.24



Monday, April 8, 2024

Biggest solar event of our lifetime.

Event: Noon to 3 p.m.

Max Eclipse at 1:44 p.m.

Eclipse glasses will be available at several locations across campus.



From Sherman, Texas

Obscuration: 99.9%

Partial Begins: 12:25 p.m.

Maximum: 1:44 p.m.

Partial Ends: 3:00 p.m.

AUSTIN COLLEGE

175

ESTABLISHED 1849

I think it's cool that this is happening in the middle of AC's 175th year celebration.

It's gonna be great.

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Last week, I saw this post on one of the College Chaplain Facebook groups that I'm part of:

I just had a student come into my office all freaked out about whether or not the April 8th eclipse is a sign from God. He was talking about the beginning and end of the Hebrew alphabet the cities it passes over like Nineveh with Jonah in the Bible etc.

There have certainly been some people who claim to be "Christian" scholars writing and saying things about how this particular solar eclipse, in this particular part of the world, at this particular point in history is clearly evidence of divine judgment and somehow related to the beginning of the End Times or some such thing.

Reading that post reminded me of this quote I haven't thought about in a long time:

You see, it was the eclipse. It came into my mind, in the nick of time, how Columbus, or Cortez, or one of those people, played on an eclipse as a saving trump once, on some savages, and I saw my chance, I could play it myself now...

Mark Twain wrote that in "A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court."

That book was published in 1881.

Twain and many other Americans had seen a total eclipse in 1876.

The "Connecticut Yankee" in the book uses an eclipse to make fanciful and unreasonable claims about his own "magical" powers.

(Regarding that quote, we certainly do not--and should not--refer to indigenous peoples as "savages" any more, and we don't and shouldn't revere imperialist "conquistadors" like Columbus and Cortez in the same way Twain's contemporaries did.)

But Twain had a point about misusing eclipses to make false claims about prophecy and power.

I'm pretty sure he had seen and heard some preachers offer some pretty fanciful and far-fetched explanations of the eclipse of 1876.

And it's happening again in 2024.

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Two things about those who see unique meaning in this particular solar eclipse:

1. No.

This eclipse is absolutely not some capricious act of judgment by a mean and grumpy God. Just because we are alive right now does not mean that this eclipse has any more meaning than any other. It's pretty cocky to think this one is different just because we know about it.

2. Sincere people like the student mentioned in that Facebook post who look to the Bible to find some sort of meaning in this eclipse could be invited to consider Psalm 19:1-4 and Psalm 8:3-5.

The Common English translation of Psalm 19:1-4 says:

*Heaven is declaring God's glory;
the sky is proclaiming his handiwork.*

*² One day gushes the news to the next,
and one night informs another what needs to be known.*

*³ Of course, there's no speech, no words –
their voices can't be heard –*

*⁴ but their sound extends throughout the world;
their words reach the ends of the earth.
God has made a tent in heaven for the sun.*

The person who wrote that psalm did not know as much as we do about astronomy.

That's just a fact.

But many of us continue to find meaning in those words.

They are expressions of gratitude and appreciation for the order and consistency of the place (county, planet, galaxy) where we woke up this morning.

Psalm 8:3-5 says:

*³ When I look up at your skies,
at what your fingers made –
the moon and the stars
that you set firmly in place –*

*⁴ what are human beings
that you think about them;
what are human beings
that you pay attention to them?*

*⁵ You've made them only slightly less than divine,
crowning them with glory and grandeur.*

Those words from Psalm 8 include similar expressions of gratitude for the order of everything we see and are surrounded by.

But they also include the grateful recognition that we humans are capable of looking around and figuring stuff out.

Part of why it's so cool to be us, and to be here now, is that many of our fellow humans have been able to study and figure out and predict all sorts of things (including eclipses).

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For those of us who look to the Bible for language to articulate meaning, I think this is a time to celebrate the created order and the ability of scientists to study and understand it.



Come to the Aclipse party!

Wear your glasses.

Learn some stuff.

Have some fun.

Use the brains God gave you.

Don't worry about a thing.

Until next time, I remain,
Just Another Cowboy Preacher,
Reminding Myself That It's Still an Eclipse Even When It's Cloudy,

JOHN WILLIAMS
Chaplain