

Look at What's Coming

A sermon preached at Niles Discovery Church, Fremont, California,
on Sunday, September 27, 2026, by the Rev. Jeffrey Spencer.

Scriptures: [Acts 1:3-11](#) and [Mark 14:53-65](#)

Copyright © 2026 by Jeffrey S. Spencer

I don't know how many of you have taken up the daily spiritual practice we've been invited to do during this Season of Creation. The invitation was quite simple: to take a moment to look at the sky and notice what you notice. The more involved version of this invitation was to journal about what you notice. This is all in the cause of letting the air teach you, which is our theme this year.

One of the things I've noticed is that I haven't notice the air except on a day when the wind was blowing. I've noticed clouds and the lack of clouds, and I've noticed the various hues of blue in the sky. I've notice cloud formations, which sometimes seem very unformed. I've noticed the lack of the moon in the night sky. And these past couple days, I've noticed the beauty of the moon in the night sky – something I failed to capture with my camera. The air, however, is clear, and so I don't notice it. It's there. I know it's there because I breathe. But I don't notice it unless I feel it moving against my skin.



Someone posted this photo of some clouds on Facebook and asked what we saw in it. I see a tadpole swimming to the right, and a fish (maybe a sunfish) swimming to the left. And maybe in between them, there's a school of fish off in the distance. As this worship series has unfolded, I've started wondering if I should have called it, "Letting the Clouds Teach Us."



Daniel Cooperrider points out, "The connection between clouds and time is emblematic of the more general relationship humans tend to sense between the sky and time. For many cultures and for much of history, the sky is where humans have looked to

tell the time. From the regular movements of the stars and the moon we get astronomy, calendars, chronological time, Stonehenge, and sundials. From the erratic appearance and metamorphosis of the clouds we get meteorology, derived from the Greek *meteora*,¹ meaning a moment when something suddenly appears in the sky, like a meteor.

In Latin, *tempus* means both weather and time. And from that Latin we get both *temporal* and *tempest* in English. In French *le temps*, and in Spanish *el tiempo*, mean both time and weather. You might remember that Greek differentiates between *chronos* and *kairos*. *Chronos* is the word from which we get chronology. *Chronos* is the passage of time that is measured with the seasons, the phases of the moon, the rising of the sun, and finally with clocks and watches. *Kairos* is time out of time. A *kairos* moment is a right, critical, or opportune moment for decisive action.

In the biblical narratives, I think clouds tend to tell time more often as *kairos* than as *chronos*. I think of the cloud that enveloped Moses when he was up on the mountain receiving the Ten Commandments, and before that, God leading the freed Hebrews as a pillar of cloud, and before that, the clouds as the place where God hangs up the bow, choosing a covenant of peace with creation. And because of those *kairos* moments with the clouds, they can call us into *chronos*, reminding us of the past.

And in today's scripture lessons, clouds call us into the future. In the first lesson, we heard the story of the Ascension, the story of the resurrected Jesus ascending into heaven after hanging out with the disciples for 40 days. "... as [the disciples] were watching, [Jesus] was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight" (Acts 1:9). This is one of my favorite artistic renderings of the Ascension.



It's by Hans Süss von Kulmbach, painted in 1513. Setting aside the issue of everyone looking like they're white northern Europeans rather than Galileans, I love that all we see of Jesus is his feet as he rides a cloud up to God.

In our second lesson, Jesus has been arrested and brought before the high priests of the Temple. The way Mark tells the story, in an effort to manufacture a reason to execute Jesus, the priests get people to offer false testimony against Jesus. It's only when Jesus is asked directly, "Are you the Messiah, the son of the Blessed One?" that Jesus says he is. Then Jesus says, "and 'you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power' and 'coming with the clouds of heaven.'"

Jesus is quoting a line from Daniel, one of the books in the Hebrew scriptures. Daniel was written about 200 years before Jesus. Rome was already occupying Israel, subjugating it to the empire's vice

¹ Daniel Cooperrider, *Speak with the Earth and It Will Teach You* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2022), 170.

grip of oppression. “The world for them, as it has for so many others throughout history, must have felt like an unjust and chaotic place. It must have felt far from their deepest hopes and dreams for what [a] better, more beautiful world could be possible. And so, [Daniel] speaks to the people about the distant future. The prophet peers toward that more beautiful world. And his vision is that even if the world as it is now seems unjust and confusing, God’s justice and God’s truth will get the last word. The apocalyptic vision then is a hopeful vision, because the end belongs to God, not to the powers-that-be of today. To the question ‘What’s going to happen? What’s the end going to be like?’ the prophet proclaims, ‘God is going to make it happen. The end will be with God. The end will be God.’”²

“In Daniel’s vision, God will appear at the end of time and send someone like a savior to earth to set up a final order of justice and righteousness. And the way the savior will come, as Daniel sees it, will be as ‘one like a human being coming on the clouds of heaven’ (Daniel 7:13).”³

“While Daniel’s vision is a unique, standalone apocalyptic moment in the Hebrew Bible,” writes Daniel Cooperrider, “In the New Testament his vision played a critical role in shaping the early Christian communities understanding of what the end times would be like. For the early Jesus followers and writers of the gospels, the vague ‘human one’ [that Daniel speaks of] is identified as Jesus, and that phrase ‘human one’ becomes the main title that the New Testament uses to name Jesus – ‘the son of Man.’”⁴

I think one of the more human moments in these two readings is in the Ascension story in Acts 1. Right after Jesus utters his final words, “as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.” This King James Version is a little more poetic: “while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him.” And he’s gone. The disciples are looking up into the sky. Though there were clouds, I imagine that sky must have seemed empty for the disciples in this story. Then “two angels, or strangers at least, tap them on the shoulder. ‘Why do you stand there looking into the sky?’ They ask. ‘This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way as you have seen him go into heaven’ (Acts 1:11). In other words, the Son of Humanity, the human one, the one who left into the clouds will come back with the clouds.”⁵

Over the centuries, preachers have looked to lines in scripture about the human one’s return and predicted when that would happen. Hal Lindsey said it would happen in 1988 and later said it would happen in 2000. Harold Camping said it would happen in 1994. Subsequently to being wrong about that, he predicted May 21, 2011. And then adjusted his date several times when the dates he predicted came and went. In a May 1980 broadcast of his television program *The 700 Club*, televangelist Pat Robertson said, “I guarantee you by the end of 1982 there is going to be a judgment on the world.”⁶ Of course, you don’t need to have access to publishing houses, radio stations, or television stations to

² *Ibid*, 171.

³ *Ibid*.

⁴ *Ibid*, 171-172.

⁵ *Ibid*, 172.

⁶ Gabe Pressman, “The Prophets of Doom,” *NBC New York*, <https://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/local/the-prophets-of-doom/2123286/> (posted 20 May 2011; accessed 27 September 2026).

make predictions. About 10 days ago, ironforge_40 posted on Threads, “Final warning. Jesus is coming back. 100%”⁷

Benjamin Cremer, who was raised in rural Idaho in what he calls “a very fundamentalist or ultra conservative sect of Christianity,” and eventually found his way to the United Methodist Church,⁸ posted a response: “He’s already here. He’s the refugee detained for simply seeking asylum from political violence. He’s the Palestinian being bombed. He’s the hungry kid no longer getting SNAP benefits. He’s the sick grandmother no longer getting healthcare. He’s the homeless arrested for sleeping outside. We will be judged by him by how we treat them: Matthew 25:31-46. It’s a broken Christianity that threatens people with Jesus’ return while refusing to recognize him in the faces of those who are suffering.”⁹

Jesus is already here.

When I look to the sky this week, as I let the air teach me, I hope the clouds remind me that I don’t need to look to the skies for the human one’s return.

Jesus is already here.

Amen.

⁷ Benjamin Cremer, post on Blue Sky, <https://bsky.app/profile/brcremer.bsky.social/post/3mvr53lzf2e> (posted 17 or 18 September 2026; accessed 27 September 2026).

⁸ In an interview published by Ruth Braunstein, “Rev. Benjamin Cremer on Losing His Church and Finding His Calling (Q&A Part 1),” *Democracy is Hard*, <https://ruthbraunstein.substack.com/p/rev-benjamin-cremer-on-losing-his> (posted 10 July 2025; accessed 27 September 2026).

⁹ Cremer, *op. cit.*