

Dashboard Jesus

by Jim Breslin

I put a stake in the ground. Attached to the stake is a sign that reads, "Ya gotta believe!" You see, I understand it's all about marketing. I chose this corner for a reason. It's a high traffic corner. Two blocks from the baseball stadium. The last stop, a traffic light, before entering the on-ramp to the highway.

I drive the second stake into the parched earth. We haven't seen rain in a week, which is something I note. I've created this second sign myself, salvaging an old refrigerator box and neatly block-lettering the words "Jesus Saves" in black magic marker.

A horn honks so I turn. Two unkempt dockworkers driving a produce truck wave. When I wave back, they laugh. They go about their day as if they don't see it coming. But I can see it.

I'm careful to put the signs in the right order, to tell the story in the correct way. The third sign reads, "Are you ready for the Rapture?" This is the final stake in the ground.

Most people act as if they don't know, or they don't care. After tapping in the signs, I wait for a clearing in traffic and step into the street. I review my work, insuring the signs are set so drivers can read them as they wait for the green light. Sinners read the messages, and then reflect as they cruise onto the highway. They drive without interruption, the message seeping into their hearts.

Some days I count the cars. I sense the end is coming. I feel it in my bones. I read aloud from the brown leather bible handed down from my mother. At one point, I thought I would pass this heirloom on to my daughter, but now I see there won't be time.

When I first started this, a few months ago, I was timid about looking people in the eye. But gradually I've gotten over that. We're running out of time. I need to catch their attention. Stare them down. Some people make quick eye contact. They glance away, fiddle with their cell phones, adjust their radio dials. But sometimes, we share a moment. I try to drink in the pain, the pity, that I see in

their eyes. I smile slightly to assure them that even though the end is very near, they too can be saved.

In my little apartment a few blocks away, I've made a little shrine. I collect things I find on the side of the road. In the center is a little plastic dashboard Jesus that I found in the grass. Who would throw such a thing out? On the little shelf, surrounding Jesus, I've placed other relics I've found. Funeral mass cards. Silver crucifixes. Rosary beads.

A mother pulls up to the red light, her son is strapped into the back seat. She's smoking a cigarette. I can see her mind is not focused on the present moment, but is engaged in a battle. The boy in the back seat studies the signs and then stares at me. He has light brown hair and bright blue eyes. His face has drawn me in. I can tell he's inquisitive. He's not judgmental. In this boy, I see the face of Jesus. He could be the one. The end is very close. Very close indeed.

