

Politics at God's Funeral

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August 29, 2010

God is Dead Joke

FOOTBALL SEASON IS COMING UP!

Three football fans are in a church, praying for their teams. The first one asks, "Oh Lord when will the Arizona Cardinals next win the Super Bowl?"

God Replies, "In the next five years."

"But I'll be dead by then," says the man.

The second one asks, "Oh Lord, when will Miami dolphins next win the Super Bowl?"

The Good Lord - answers, "In the next ten years."

"But I'll be dead by then," says the man.

The third one asks, "Oh Lord when will the Green Bay Packers win the Super Bowl?".

God answers, "I'll be dead by then!"

In 1966 an April issue of Time magazine proclaimed the death of God. The idea that God is dead was not a new idea then as it is not a new idea today. Philosophically the idea can be traced back a few hundred years. The name and face of the death of God movement is often associated with an existential philosopher named Frederick Nietzsche. The proclamation is not a theological statement that God was alive and now God is dead the way we observe the life and death process with each other. The proclamation is that the God of our culture and our institutions is dead and has been dead for a long time.

There are many essays written about the way our consensus about God and values continues to shrink. I only want to acknowledge this trend in western civilization and acknowledge that there are effects on us and every dimension in our society.

What I want to offer this morning is that a lot of the craziness we experience around us is because we are in the middle of grieving as a society. We are in the middle of a social emotional process.

Lets think about funerals for a minute and the family dynamics.

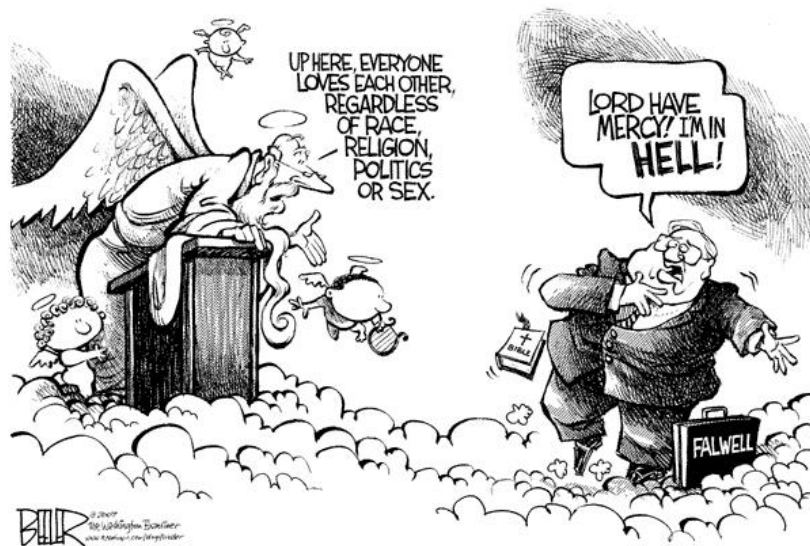
The most important event in the life of an individual is to be born. The most important event in the life of a family is a death in the family. When a person in a family is alive relationships and roles in the family are kind of fixed. When a person in a family dies then all of the relationships and roles in the family are loosened up and up for grabs. People who were together because of that person can now go apart and people who were cut off from each other can now come together. More emotional cutoffs and reconciliations happen in a family at the time of a death than any other time.

EXAMPLE: For years my brothers and I assumed that we would always go back to our parents' home for Thanksgiving. As they got older and we finally noticed how much work it was for them we began to think that perhaps one of us should take on the

responsibility of the family Thanksgiving feast (and I was always convinced that it should be one of them). This simple change made us aware that if we as brothers with our very busy and separate lives were to remain close and connected we would need to be very intentional about it. This would be especially true when Mom and Dad would die. Together we observed how our parents drifted away from their own siblings when our grandparents, their parents, died. A death in the family despite the pain of loss and grief has the potential of allowing everyone to start new again.

Now, I ask you to think about this on a big scale. The God promoted by the institutional church is dead. The institutional church and the God of the church doesn't work anymore. The death of God has been proclaimed and western society has been hanging out at God's funeral for a couple of hundred years. People, values, and societal roles have loosened up. People, values, and roles are all in flux and are coming together in some new ways and some of it makes our heads spin. Let me give you some examples.

A political cartoon about Jerry Falwell going to heaven reflects a stereotype of conservatism.



In our own congregation we have members with conservative political views but very much embrace and promote an inclusive ethic. It would be wrong for us to label ourselves as a liberal church as we are also conservatives that believe in the equality and dignity of every person regardless of their ethnicity, religion, politics, gender, or sexual orientation. It is a new separating and coming together. For some of us it makes our heads spin.

Another example: We have had same sex couples visit us and say to us how much they appreciate our use of the Bible and our biblically based message. To some people this seems like a contradiction that a bible based worship and message would be valued by people in our society who have had to endure painful judgment of people who justified

their prejudice on the bible. It is a new separating and coming together. For some of us it makes our heads spin.

A young man who was raised in the Pentecostal tradition wants to start a new church. He wants the worship style to be Pentecostal but he has a progressive and inclusive theology. He needs a place to nurture the spark of his new church start. I want us to allow him to do this here at Shadow Rock. It is strange that we would allow a Pentecostal church to birth here at Shadow Rock but part of what makes it right for us is that this potential new church founder is gay as well as Pentecostal. It is a new separating and coming together. For some of us it makes our heads spin.

We are in the middle of politics at God's funeral. Politics is not the negative polarizing rhetoric that dominates the media. Politics are the ways we decide how to order our life together as a society. All of this turmoil is happening among the most immature in our society as they jockey for power at God's funeral. In the mean time the rest of us are figuring out what our new relationships and roles will be. It is an unsettling time but it is also a time that holds tremendous promise. It holds promise because the God created in our image and sustained by the institutional church is dead, but the God of all life and love is alive and well.

Behold I make all things new! Where are the perceptive, sensitive, and responsive ones? They are in the middle of the new thing that the Spirit is doing in the world.