

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Wow, well aren't biblical readings sometimes very prescient. We have Jesus being quite apocalyptic, in a week (to steel a phrase from ABC commentator Chris Uhlmann) the punchline has become the president. I know many of you have had your fill (months and months ago) of the American Election, but this sermon cannot not make mention of it. The press and the media only a week ago were in their own way saying "don't worry, he will never get in" but for a second time this year the pollsters were signally wrong and the people they thought they knew, voted in ways they thought unthinkable.

There are plenty of ideas and commentary going around at present but what I would like do as best I can, is to make some comment in church. I want to do this, in part because white evangelicals voted for the punchline in huge numbersⁱ Their theology, a conservative theology, a theology that is no longer contained in America and can at times define others. I do not want to be defined by it. If I might read to you a tweet by Franklin Graham, the son of Billy Graham, the CEO of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. He wrote on November 10, *I believe God's hand intervened Tuesday night to stop the godless, atheistic progressive agenda from taking control.*ⁱⁱ I am not sure that is where I would begin; I am sure I do not want to be defined by voices like his.

Where to begin? I appreciate that you could begin with almost any hyper provocative statement of the last year, or with the cultural misogyny that has been on display in America, or with the worrying and barely hidden racism in rust belt America. You can start almost anywhere, but I would like to start with the idea that we have in the new President the first **post truth president**.

It has been manifestly clear that lies don't seem to matter much now. The truth is a flexible thing. It always has been to some extent, what I think the notion of *post truth* is that truth is no longer a valued thing; certainly not in the run up to the American Election. Style, flimflam, bluster, and anger are more respected than cool truth.

This idea of truth reminded me of the ideas of post modernism that I remember back in the 90s. Back then, at University there were plenty of books about the age we thought we were then moving into. The Postmodern age. One of the hallmarks of what was then thought to be a new age, was that we had not access to absolute truth. There was my truth, your truth, but no overarching truth, as Jean Francois Lyotard (French thinker) defined it "postmodern is incredulity toward metanarratives". Back then, as we were encouraged to read these books, there was a sense of the possible freedom that postmodernism could bring and end of the violent domination of the powerful, but another idea was that postmodernism would also herald a crisis in sources of authority. The decline of mainstream religion was seen as a symptom of this. There is a cost to these changes; the move from modernism to post modernism, the crisis in authority is not without consequence; we are starting to see its consequences.

What we seem to be seeing in both the Brexit vote and the American Election (boy what a year 2016 is proving to be) is a distrust of established authorities, the liberal elites, and also a distrust of the news media, which is partly why polling seemed to get it so very wrong.

We seem to be moving (at least politically in America) to a post truth age with a proudly Know Nothing President.

It feels rather like we are experiencing the dark side of postmodernism.ⁱⁱⁱ

Our problems, which at the moment might seem to be the election of what some have called amusingly, the horror clown are in fact much greater than him, the post truth age is going to spring greater worries than him, I believe.

I want to bring another insight into this sermon, and once again, I am aware that there is so much commentary, so much to make sense of, that it is hard to winnow down ideas at the moment. But the idea I want to share, links in with the post truth age, and also the curiosity of why so many White Evangelical Christians voted for Trump, some 81%^{iv}. This is something that was commented on by Shadi Hamid of the Brookings Institution, a Washington based think tank. Shadi is a Muslim commentator which makes his comments all the more insightful I think. He made these comments on the Minefield Podcast on Radio National. In the episode "What is the meaning of Trump"^v he noted *"America has suffered from the decline of mainstream Christianity, Christianity wasn't just for far right evangelicals, it binded communities together providing that sense of belonging and brotherhood. People are desiring meaning in America but they did not find that meaning in Christianity. Trump is as un Christian as you can get in his politics. What has taken the place of moderate or mainstream Christianity is something worse, so be careful what you wish for."*

They then went on to talk about nativism. But his comment reminded me of the quote attributed to GK Chesterton. "A person who won't believe in God will believe in anything."

So going back to Shadi Hamid, we should be careful what we wish for.

I think the point he makes is a serious one. We think of American as a Christian country, but the decline in mainstream Christianity is huge. Something similar is happening here, we see stats about the decline in Christianity but the decline in what we might call moderate Christianity is even more marked, it is just that this decline is hidden by the apparent buoyancy of conservative right leaning forms of faith.

And in that vacuum left by the receding tide of reasonable faith, all manner of things might enter; welcome to the world of horror clowns.

This sounds extremely pessimistic, the silver lining of the last few days, and even going back to the Brexit vote in Britain it is now clearer than ever, that something with the way we run things is not working. This is a point that Russell Brand has been making recently^{vi}. I would have to agree with him on this. The fact that 1% of the world's population own as much as the 99% is not a political statement but a moral impetus. Globalisation seems to be leaving people behind even as it raises the quality of life for others. It is not a surprise that people who feel that political elites have not served them well have voted them out. The median American family has seen no improvement in real income since 1999^{vii}

So where to with this. In this postmodern world where we no longer have the defining voice what can we do? If it is true that the failure of the mainstream churches to provide a compelling vision of the good life has contributed to this, what do we need to do now.

In the last few days I have seen people say that in this space we need to Roar, Shout, Resist. But I wonder if we need to repent of our over confidence, a historical lag from the 1950s, we need to proclaim afresh (sermons are not just enough, not now) and act (we need to get out of these God boxes and act.)

We need to articulate what we believe and why we believe it. To offer a compelling, captivating vision of the Christian life. To have a vision of the kingdom that is both wider and deeper than the vision that we previously offered. For people (and this surely is the story of the Old Testament, people will seek king, even very flawed ones)

Once again if there is a silver lining to these events for us, the battle for ideas is clearly before us. We must step into a space we once had exclusively to ourselves and speak in a way that can be heard. History has not ended, it is back with vengeance and we need to enter the completion for ideas.

Amen.

ⁱ <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/11/08/us/politics/election-exit-polls.html>

ⁱⁱ https://twitter.com/Franklin_Graham/status/796748013846822913

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2016/09/27/clinton-vs-trump-modern-vs-postmodern/>

^{iv} <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/11/08/us/politics/election-exit-polls.html>

^v https://radio.abc.net.au/search?service_guid=RN-mld-20161110-8012414

^{vi} <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w3Ou5uFFn8Q&t=334s>

^{vii} <http://www.smh.com.au/comment/history-repeats-another-despot-rises-to-the-top-on-a-wave-of-discontent-20161111-gsnm1h.html>