

Grove Presbyterian Church
13 December, 2009

Do you feel it?

Flux and change.

Do you feel it?

Yellowstone is moving west across the entire Great Basin 12 millimeters a year. Over centuries the hot spot deep below the plates will burn and bubble beneath Minneapolis.

*Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire burn, and caldron bubble.
[Macbeth Act 4, scene 1, 10-11, etc.]*

The tectonic plates are on the move. It's like we're teetering on a skateboard.

So too mother earth herself. Our globe is a top spinning, spinning, spinning...

Do you feel it?

We are rotating at a speed of 1,000 miles per hour. No cosmic state troopers to pull us over. A bullet from an AK47 travels 1,600 miles per hour. Right now we are traveling $\frac{1}{4}$ the speed of a bullet.

The cruise speed of a Boeing 747 is only a measly 650 miles per hour.

But that is only the rotation. Spinning, spinning, spinning.

Add to that our revolutions around the sun. 67,000 miles per hour.

Is anyone here dizzy?

I am.

My world is changing fast enough to give me motion sickness. Like the time my brothers and I jumped into the spinning Mad Hatter Tea Cups at Disneyland (Yes, Disneyland) and they grabbed the wheel with a vengeance to make sure little brother threw up.

He did. Filled up that Tea Cup.

*Alice had been looking over his shoulder with some curiosity.
`What a funny watch!' she remarked. `It tells the day of the
month, and doesn't tell what o'clock it is!'*

*`Why should it?' muttered the Hatter. `Does your watch tell you
what year it is?'*

What year is it, by the way? Last time I checked it was only
1999.

Can we wind our clocks back farther? Let's hop into the WABAC
Machine, shall we Sherman?

Spinning, spinning, spinning.

Once upon a time, it was a shocking state of affairs when a fair
haired Protestant boy would have courted and wanted to marry a
red headed Roman Catholic lass. For theological reasons. Fears
of incompatibility. Never, never, no never. The church (from
both sides of town) forbids it!

Or the day I asked my father about what it was like when Pearl
Harbor was bombed. He told me how they all knew from the radio
announcement that it was very important, but son, you need to
understand how nobody really knew what Pearl Harbor was. Who
knew about such things in Hawaii? It was another world, far,
far away.

Or my wife's grandfather, captured in World War I by the Turks in
the British campaign of Kut-al-Amara in Mesopotamia. It took six
months for Elaine's grandmother and the rest of England to get
word of the surrender. Six months.

*`Yes, that's it,' said the Hatter with a sigh: `it's always tea-
time,
and we've no time to wash the things between whiles.'*

`Then you keep moving round, I suppose?' said Alice.

`Exactly so,' said the Hatter: `as the things get used up.'

*`But what happens when you come to the beginning again?' Alice
ventured to ask.*

I'm not particularly sure if values in culture look for sameness,
not differences -- but I suspect this is youthful reaction to all
the rapid changes of our growing global familiarity, the erasing
of nationalism, a new age far different from the one I remember.
And I'm not that old. Though I do remember writing my college

term papers on a manual Underwood.

*Drizzle, drizzle, drizzle drone
Time for 'zis one to come home*

Just ponder how different our once predictable, stable world has become, given the spinning dervish of contemporary culture:

Between Kenya (4 million), Ghana (600,000), and Cameroon (180,000), there are more Presbyterians there than in the United States by over a million. The face of Presbyterianism isn't Scottish, it is African, Asian. Zambia is sending missionaries to us...

London, no longer New York, is the financial capital of the world...

The home of the largest film industry? India, not Hollywood

The largest mall in the world is in Beijing...

Every continental inch of our planet has been explored...

How, as the National Geographic reported, after two million years the age of the hunter gathering is, as of last year, over, the last of the bushmen have turned tour guides...

How 357 planets have been discovered outside our solar system, with more to come...

How when you look at a **white baby**, you are looking at the **new minority** in this country - surely by 2050 if not sooner. White as minority is already the case in Florida, California, Texas...

It just might help to remember that youths graduating from High School today were born in the early 90's. Bill Clinton became president, *Unforgiven* won the best picture Oscar, Sears cancelled printing its catalogue, pocket size telephones became commonplace, the computer game Doom was able to be downloaded through the internet. They are the children who have witnessed the last gasp of the US as dominating uni-laterally the world's economy, military, geo-politics.

Our kids have inherited a very different world. They see Obama as first post-modern president. Theirs is a global world view. They don't think in terms of national borders. It is nothing to them to fly to Madrid or Romania. "Hey, mom," our daughter would phone from her cell phone. "I'm in Budapest now."

Nor do they really see race. Or think homosexuality is deviant. "What's the big deal?" my daughters ask.

Remember the day when mixed-race couples were shunned, a scandal; wind the clock back and it was the way parents forbade Roman Catholics and Protestants to marry. To protect them. Now, refreshingly, the attitude is that there is only one race, our DNA identical.

Look around: these youths are pan racial. Pan national. Pan denominational. Pan religious.

One preacher (The Present Future by Reggie McNeal) has written: "the first Reformation [Luther's] was about freeing the church. The new reformation is about freeing God's people from the church."

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No wonder then there also are pockets of apprehension and backlash, what religion author Phyllis Tickle refers to as "the resisters." Defenders of orthodoxy. To the ramparts! Forward to the 19<sup>th</sup> century!

How many of us have heard older friends, family, or neighbors profile physicians and refuse referrals to cardiologists or surgeons because their names hint of Muslim origin?

Visiting my parents the other month, we drove by the Pentecostal church at the time when it was letting out from worship. They had police officers directing traffic. Mom scoffed in bitterness. All that contemporary music and boisterous praying. More participatory worship. Where doctrine isn't as important as belonging.

I thought it wonderful - people were worshipping, part of a community of faith. But what mom was venting was decades of investing herself in our family Presbyterian Church which once upon a time boasted three services and over 1,200 members. Now my home church has dwindled to one service with fewer than we see here on a Sunday morning. Her world is dying. It scares her, hurts her. It is bitter for her to accept the new world that has already arrived.

Those who are wiser -- us included I hope -- simply hope to tie a spiritual and moral tail to this high-flying post-modern kite and keep the string intact, lest it get buffeted by the wind and careen either to the ground or spiral wildly away into the sky.

As Andrew Helfer said during Church school: "not all change is progress, but all progress is change."

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I join those who suggest we are seeing emerge a new and more vibrant form of Christianity. Our challenge is: do we resist it? Or join the shaping of it? Doctor what is harmful whilst embracing what in this culture is good.

We want the church to transform culture, yes, and it has. Way more than we may realize. We helped produce some of the good things our children have inherited.

...what is required is the conversion of mankind from self-centered to Christ-centeredness as a universal and present divine possibility, the abyss of love is deeper than the abyss of death, Christ's kingdom is not a rule over external conditions but over the spirits of men, not human progress in culture but the divine conversion of the spirit of man from which all culture arises. -
-- F. D. Maurice, as quoted by H. Richard Niebuhr

But culture, yes, obviously also is transforming the church. It always has. Once upon a time there would have been no way we would allow divorced persons to serve as Elders or Deacons or surely as Ministers of the Word and Sacrament. Of course, even longer ago, women were forbidden to so serve.

Could it be that God in Christ is at work reforming the church through the culture? All the more reason then to hear Paul's charge to the Ephesians as a very modern challenge.

Listen:

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift.