

The Valley, Overshadowed By Death

Psalm 23

Zombies vs. the Future

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Each week millions of people turn to tablets, televisions and phones to watch an immensely popular program called “The Walking Dead” (based on an already popular comic). It has proved to be a wildly successful franchise for its actors, director, writers, and producers. The overly simplistic explanation of the plot is that there has been some sort of zombie apocalypse and there are a variety of characters whom the show follows attempting to survive being turned into zombies themselves.

Somewhere along the way, the proliferation of Zombies became one of the central myths of storytelling in the American vernacular. From video games battling plants and zombies to zombie walk events where people take the day to dress up and shuffle like the undead in their local community, these anonymous characters of the undead have resonated with the American psyche.

Why? What about our historical milieu brings these groaning, staggering and cloudy eyed characters? Religious scholar Kelly J. Baker claims any easy answer to this is difficult. She says:

“Postmodernity, global war, neoliberalism, racism, misogyny, secularism, supernaturalism, and gun violence all tie into the zombie’s pervasiveness, but the *why* still remains elusive.” Yet, one thing that is not disputed in most psychology of the monsters we create as part of our myths is that they somehow represent our fears. Our security obsessed culture has proliferated and profited on the nightmares of each of our fears. From politicians to televangelists our fears have proven to be a goldmine.

Yet, the undead are not alive, but dead reanimated to walk this earth. Dead, but not dead. Walking throughout the earth day to day with no thoughts, no purpose, no identity, and beginning or end. We don’t have to be zombies to live that reality. As the writer Romain Rolland observed “There are some dead who are more alive than the living.”

Are we lost to the living, even when we are breathing and have a pulse coursing through our veins? Is all life intends that we go through the motions of the day's expectations and each cycle of the sun and moon are temporarily broken by entertainment or pleasure? If this is true then Dave and Busters will be the salvation of us all.

It seems that with movies on demand, information at the click of a mouse, the latest fruit based game app for our electronic devices we have found new and creative ways of anesthetizing ourselves from the reality of life that surrounds us. The numbing of our true selves helps us to mark time on our calendars, like a prisoner in a cell, until our timely or untimely bodily functions cease and the end of all of our respiration. The Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff has described this condition aptly:

“Modern society has produced a wild atomization of existence and a general anonymity of persons lost in the cogs of the mechanisms of the macro-organizations and bureaucracies. These massive structures produce uniformity—uniformity of behavior, of societal framework, of schedules and timetables, and so on.”

The undead, walk the earth!

You Are More Than a Number on a Spreadsheet

You are more than the annual report of productivity by our government's labor statistics. You are much more than the savings racked up on your loyalty card from CVS. You are greater than the friends you have on Instagram. You are deeper than the coffees you have punched on your card, or the safe driving record you have made through your Progressive Insurance Agency. You are more!

What are you? You are part of the divine's plan for this world. It is so often we hear the words of Psalm 23 at funerals that we forget that this is meant for the living. Hope when we find ourselves in the midst of a dry, parched and unsatisfying existence.

Because we know that death is not the final arbiter. It is also not the ceasing of bodily functions in the scripture. We know that death is also equated with sin. Sin is a pervasive shadow in our society, but we have so many that despise the concept and attempt to ignore its presence on our planet.

There is one thing that I know, sin exists. Sin is a part of our community when we allow ourselves to create structures, relationships and churches which diminish the full humanity of every single person on this earth. When we diminish our own existence, we violate the purpose of the fullness promised to us in creation.

We are not alone. Our creator reminds us that they are with us, no matter who we claim to be in this world. We have the presence of the almighty surrounding us, no matter the temptations, no matter the distractions, no matter the despair, no matter the dissolution, no matter the loss, pain, or tears. We are promised the presence of divinity that enfolds us, comforts us, listens to us, talks to us and even creates the air we breathe.

Are we not gifted this morning? We no longer have to lumber through life with its hours unattended. We matter to the divine, we are accepted by the divine and the divine finds us so fascinating that we are continually being refashioned by that potter's deft hand. If you do not know that you are important, that is a sad sin of omission before the creator who loves you. Turn today and see your importance to God. Even in that valley, overshadowed by death, the divine can be your guide. Thanks be to God.