

From The Pastor's Study Every Week Has A Sunday

When I became Senior Pastor at Greenbrier Presbyterian Church a pastor friend of mine told me “There is one thing you can depend on is that every week has a Sunday.” I understood to some degree what he was saying but I didn’t comprehend the depth of meaning in his words. This week I finally got it after all these years.

Each week a pastor is expected to provide a sermon, this part I fully understood even then. What I didn’t fully grasp is there are about fifty-five sermons each year, over a period of a little over six years that is about three hundred fifty sermons and they are all expected to be fresh. The average sermon requires about twenty hours of preparation, that is seven thousand hours.

The problem is each sermon needs to be fresh. I know a pastor who rotated his sermons every three years, he would just pull out the sermon, knock the dust off, change a few words and put it out there. I don’t know why but I just can’t do that.

What no one ever told me is that one day I would come across a sermon that just kicks my butt, a sermon that I just don’t want to deliver. I preach in themes and every now and then one in the series brings with it issues that are a little rough to deal with. That is what happened this week, only this one wasn’t a little rough, it tried to stomp me in the ground.

The scripture and reviewing many theologians kept taking me to a place I didn’t want to be. Views of the scripture took me to not just a conservative point of view but a legalistic stance that I just couldn’t get behind. I did three rewrites and each time I ended up in the same place.

Another pastor advised that I remember that I am only alone in preparing and delivering sermons if I forget to invite the Holy Spirit to guide me. In the case of today’s sermon I wasn’t alone as I wrote the sermon for the last time but it wasn’t just the Holy Spirit that got me through it, it was another friend who also helped me get my head around what I truly believe the Holy Spirit was trying to say all along.

A friend of mine sat down and we talked about the sermon for about an hour. And while I heard what she was saying, though I think she felt I wasn’t hearing her at all, it wasn’t until I absorbed her two little stories that it all came together. I immediately began writing the sermon and by five in the morning the sermon was

all but finished. Proof, at least to me, that God uses the people in our lives to lead us where He wants us.

I wrote a lot of words here to tell you about the hardest Sunday sermon I have ever put together and the fact that without help it never would have happened. Sometimes when we read God's word we do so with blinders on, we have been taught to see scripture a certain way and we miss the real story.

You see, I don't view the Bible as 66 books, or divide the Bible into old and new, the Bible is one book, one story written by numerous authors during different times in different locations. In order to grasp even a slight understanding of God we need to study the Bible, read it constantly make it your first words in the morning and close your eyes with it at night. I had to use not just my knowledge of scripture but that of someone who understands theology better than I do, someone who also views the Bible as connected from Genesis to Revelation.

But it doesn't take a theologian to gain that understanding, it takes serious study in the presence of the Holy Spirit. But when you come to those hard sayings, when legalism seems to want to take over, think of this: if God is legalistic why did He send His Son to prove His love for us. Would God send teachers and pastors to show us the true love, grace, and mercy if He wanted us to live by rigid laws?

Jesus showed love to the unlovable, He healed the unhealable, used common to bring the message of the King so that we might spend eternity with Him.