

1001 THINGS TO DO DURING A DULL SERMON
Vacation Bible School Sunday – July 17, 2011 – Romans 10: 5-17
The Church of the Covenant

For this sermon I am indebted to the small but funny book, 101 Things to Do During a Dull Sermon, by Tim Sims and Dan Pegoda. You know the moment in worship. You fully intend to focus in on what the preacher is saying; you begin well but as I digress into my exposition of how the Greek Word really doesn't mean what it says for the 45th time you begin to think of your grocery list, or everything you have to do next week, or you remember the pot roast is about to burn at home and you drift off into a parallel universe. *The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.* And then the eyes start to get heavy, and the head begins to bob and weave, and you begin that lovely 10 minute power nap in the power of the Holy Spirit right in the middle of the sermon. If anyone ever tries to wake you, just say "Amen!" and pretend you were actually deep in fervent and dedicated prayer. Or that you actually like to listen to the sermon with your eyes closed. It works for me.

How do we listen to a sermon? What is really going on in a sermon? What is the spiritual exchange that happens between God and the Word of God, the preacher and the listener, the pulpit and the pew?

I remember in growing up that my parents let me draw pictures with the pew pencils during the message. I'd take the bulletin and put about a thousand soldier stick figures on it. Thunder and lightning was issuing forth up in the pulpit but the Battle of Gettysburg was being restaged on the church bulletin down below. I am sure if anyone watched me they would have been sure that nothing actually "got through". But, you know something, it did. Focus on drawing in the presence of God and God can get through anyway.

Here are some things to do in the midst of a dull sermon. Make up cue cards and hold them up so the preacher can see them; things like, "Get to the point!" or "Tell another joke fast, you're losing us!" or "Please God help him make at least one point!" You could play a game of spotting the number of people who fall asleep in the sanctuary; extra bonus points for snorers; my question is, at the 8:30 a.m. service "who can tell?" Or you could do a large fake yawn to test out the theory –is yawning really contagious?!!! You could pinch yourself on the leg; or if you really wanted to wake up the crowd you could pinch your neighbor on the leg! There are literally thousands of things to do during a dull sermon. The dullest sermon or the most distracted listener –God still gets through to the human heart anyway.

So how do we listen to a sermon? What is really going on in a sermon? What is the spiritual exchange that happens between God and the Word of God and the preacher and the pew?

Our scripture from the Book of Romans helps answer these questions. Verse 14 asks the rhetorical question, "How can they hear without a preacher?" (Romans 10: 14) But notice it doesn't say a GREAT preacher; it just says "preacher". We are to "believe in him", believe in Jesus, when we hear about Him. We are to "call upon Him", call upon Jesus, and then we shall be saved. "For everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved." (Romans 10: 13) Please note that it does not say, "everyone who understands everything in the Bible and the Confessions of the PC (USA) shall be saved." We are saved by Jesus, by He who IS the Word of God. There is a transaction in preaching, a SPIRITUAL TRANSACTION between God and the Word of God and the preacher and the person in the pew. "If you confess Him (Jesus) with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." (Romans 10: 9) Something is spoken by God through the Word of God proclaimed into the human heart; believing occurs in the heart and not in the head, according to this verse. A sermon is

not a lecture. A sermon is not a set of informative remarks. A sermon is not a term paper written to get a good grade. A sermon is really not written at all; it is proclaimed. It is a proclamation of the Word written in the heart of the preacher, communicated to the heart of the listener, not in words, “*not with eloquent wisdom*” (I Corinthians 1: 17) “*Lest the cross be emptied of its power*”, as the Apostle Paul says elsewhere. “*We preach Christ crucified*” (I Corinthians 1: 23); we tell the story of Jesus and His love; we tell and re-tell the story of how God has sent Jesus into the world to do something for us that we cannot do for ourselves; we love to tell the story of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. Because as we tell and re-tell the old, old story people hear. People hear not so much with their head as they hear with their heart. “*In the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.*” (I Corinthians 1: 21) Preaching is FOLLY says the Apostle. How can people hear the GOOD NEWS if they are asleep spiritually? How can people know God if they do not know Him already? How do people really hear the voice of God in their life? Through the preaching of the Word; through the proclamation of Jesus Christ as Lord; through the Good News of the gospel that is always GOOD and always NEWS. The sermon is a spiritual event, not a lecture.

Then the Apostle Paul in the Book of Romans tells us why. He writes to us in our scripture lesson for today –“*The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart.*” (Romans 10: 8) The WORD is here. It is spiritually present. The Holy Spirit takes the written Word, the Bible, and through the Living Word, through Jesus Christ, through His active presence in this sanctuary when the Word of God is proclaimed, Jesus Christ Himself comes, spiritually, and it is He who writes that Word upon our heart, and it is HE who writes that Word upon our lips. It is near, because JESUS is near.

- We don’t listen with our ears; we listen with our heart.
- We don’t discern and understand with our head; we understand in our spirit.
- I am NOT the Preacher; Jesus Christ has come and it is HE, the One who IS the Word of God, who speaks to our heart today.

There are a thousand and one things to do during a dull sermon. Oh, we could re-write some old hymns, “Holy, Holy, Holy Donut!” We could re-write a responsive reading, PASTOR: Hello Dolly. Well, Hello, Dolly. CONGREGATION: Its so nice to have you back where you belong. PASTOR: You’re looking swell, Dolly. CONGREGATION: I can tell Dolly PASTOR: This is ridiculous. CONGREGATION: And also with you! You could pass a note to (DARLA, DEBBIE MILES) saying, “Play Charge like at a Ball Game (ta-ta-ta –ta-ta! Charge!)” Or you could show pictures of the pastors when they were young up on the jumbo tron at 943 (Randy with dark flowing long hair –Stu with a blond afro).

OR, OR, OR...you could remember that even in the midst of the dullest, most sleep inducing sermon, that it is Jesus Christ who has come to preach a special message of grace and Good News uniquely to your heart today...See, parents, if you really understand what a sermon truly is, it doesn’t matter whether your child is drawing on the bulletin, or wiggling in the pew, or making noise or whatever. They are listening. They are listening with their heart. And a baby in its Mother’s arms, long before it understands even one thing about the love of God, a baby can hear with its heart, just like an adult can. Parents, bring your children to church and to worship, for in the middle of the sermon, the word is near your child, on their lips, and in their heart. And it is Jesus who is preaching into the heart of your child.

Listen with SPIRITUAL EARS. That’s the *one thing* to do during a sermon...dull or otherwise! Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*

