



## Thought For The Week

*Philippians 1:21-30*

*"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."*

*September 21, 2014*

Every pastor has had one or more Sunday worship services that they would like to forget. The congregation was smaller than usual, the temperature or humidity of room was not comfortable, the music was not up to par; you name it. But for me, the worst is when I drive out of the parking lot knowing that the sermon I just delivered wasn't that great. I have sometimes felt that it wasn't any good at all. The content may have been weak, or the delivery was flat, or both. What do you do following a bad sermon?

It's probably time for a little introspection and time to be honest about your preparation. It's been my experience, that the subject matter and how comfortable you feel with it, is very important. Plus you can't always depend on having enough time to do the necessary preparation because other ministry needs keep "popping up".

You can't choose whether or not your week will be free from a funeral or a hospital visit or any number of congregational emergencies. But it's not just the content that suffers from lack of preparation. If you're not confident in your content, you're not going to be confident in the delivery of the content. Nothing can replace due diligence in researching the subject matter, drawing on yours or others personal experiences and making the content interesting to your specific congregation members.

Taking time to evaluate the message gives you the opportunity to make improvements for the next time. And who knows? It may not have been as bad as you thought! It is always good to have someone in the congregation that will give you an honest feedback on your message and delivery.

My best advice has always been to get back on the bicycle. If you only preached one sermon per year, it would be tough. But when you have several opportunities to "make up" for it, maybe you will do a lot better if you concentrate on what has worked well in the past or make improvements and above all pray about it. Never forget that your inspiration comes from God. You're quite often, without even being aware, an inspiration to many people. You can't let them down, that would be very selfish and very unproductive, i.e., don't just feel sorry for yourself or try to lay blame elsewhere.

Most importantly, don't forget the role of the Holy Spirit. My friend used to say that God makes great use of the most unlikely things. Just because you don't feel great about a sermon doesn't mean that God didn't use it in a transformative way.

If preaching were all up to us, we'd be standing in front of empty rooms each week. But it's not about us. God's spirit is actively involved in the sermon, and his promise to us is that his word will not be without value. We have to trust that his Kingdom purposes do not hang on our sermons.

*Happy Birthday Ed (9/21)*

## Stewardship Thought For The Week

One afternoon I made a routine trip to a local grocery store to pick up a couple of items for my wife. After making my selections, I made my way to the check out lanes, I selected the best option and waited for the person in front of me to pay so I could head home. Lost in no particular thought, my

trance was broken by a shrieking woman in the lane to my right.

“Where are your #%&@ peanuts! You told me they were in aisle four, and they are nowhere to be found. Can’t you people get anything right? I can’t believe you don’t even know where you keep something as basic as peanuts!”

The cashier was a little taken back by the attack, which escalated in volume with each and every punctuation mark. Shoppers across the front of the store buried their eyes in their order, needlessly rearranging their groceries on the conveyer belts before them. Co-workers scanned items with a quicker pace as if their speed would shut the customer up. The cashier, in the meantime, was patient and gracious and spoke calmly to the angry woman. The more she talked, however, the madder she became, repeating her profanity laden tirade louder than before, demanding a manager. When the manager came he asked what the problem was, and as you can imagine, got an ear full. He told her the peanuts were in aisle four. The woman followed the manager down aisle four, which by the way was marked, in part with a sign, “Snack Nuts.” And within 60 seconds they returned with her nuts from aisle four.

One would think that the woman who couldn’t find the peanuts in aisle four would offer an apology to the cashier she attacked. Or at least some lame excuse about having a bad day at work or how her lousy husband forgot to get the nuts the night before. Instead, she offered the following parting shot. “I can’t believe you people wouldn’t help me find the peanuts. If I had shopped at (your competitor), they would have dropped everything and gone and got them for me. All you did was stand there.” With that, she swiped her plastic money, grabbed her bag, and left, leaving her cart in front of the register as a final act of defiance.

Unfortunately, we Christians sometimes act the same way, just plain rude. We may not have full voiced outbursts of rage, but we who are fallen can still lose ourselves in ourselves to such an extent we do and say stupid things. You know what I’m talking about; the big eye roll, the exaggerated heavy sigh, the smirk, the sarcastic comeback. It doesn’t matter, rude is rude, and it needs to be eliminated from our interactions with others. James wrote something about the contradiction of speaking words of blessing and cursing from the same mouth. He basically calls the behavior ridiculous.

As I drove out of the parking lot, I prayed and asked God to protect me from being just plain rude. As I prayed, God reminded me that the behavior of rudeness is rooted in something deeper: pride and arrogance. So I adjusted my prayer accordingly. Just plain rude, is what she was. And we can be too when pride and arrogance rears its head in our character.