

## Homilia Interruptus

Preached Virtual Bright Sunday Service April 19, 2020

Acts 20:7-12

The old slogan claims that laughter is the best medicine, and medicine is something we all could use as the COVID pandemic wears on. As I prayed the prayer asking God to bless the words of my mouth before I begin to preach this morning, I am reminded of a preacher's little boy who one Sunday morning inquired, "Daddy, I notice every Sunday morning when you first come out to preach, you bow your head. What are you doing?" The father explained, "I'm asking the Lord to give me a good sermon." The little boy said, "So why doesn't he?"

For all your sakes, I hope that the Lord gives me a good message to share with you this morning. And that a little dose of humor on this Bright Sunday will indeed serve to be a good medicine for the spirit.

Over the course of the coronavirus pandemic, the public has been educated and reeducated about the ways that viruses spread and how to keep ourselves from being infected or infecting others.

- We've been taught to cough or sneeze into our elbow instead of our hands.
- Taught what to avoid touching and the proper procedure for hand washing to sanitize our hands after touching those things where the virus might lurk.
- We've been given guidelines about how far apart from each other we should stand, and encouraged to wear masks and gloves just in case we forget those suggestions.

These are just a few of the means at our disposal for staying safe through a pandemic. Sometimes though, messages about maintaining personal and public safety can be confusing and contradictory.

Take these statistical recommendations for example:

- Avoid riding in automobiles because they are responsible for 20% of all fatal accidents. But...
- Do not stay home because 17% of all accidents occur in the home.
- Avoid walking on streets or sidewalks because 14% of all accidents occur to pedestrians. However...
- Avoid traveling by air, rail, or water because 16% of all accidents involve these forms of transportation.

If you do require medical care, above all else, avoid hospitals. 32% of all deaths occur in hospitals.

You may be comforted to learn that only .001% of all deaths occur in worship services in church, and these are usually due to previous physical disorders.

Bible study groups, like our *Worship Connection* are also safe: the percentage of deaths during Bible study is even less than .001%.

Which indicates that attending church and reading your Bible could save your life!

Therefore, logic tells us that the safest place for you to be at any given point in time is at church! But that statistic should have an asterisk for times like this pandemic, when large gatherings in closed spaces, including churches, invite the spread of deadly viral infections.

Based solely on those statistics, the story just read from the Book of Acts should have fit neatly into that .001% safety zone. Paul was the keynote speaker at a worship gathering in the city of Troas (located in what today is Turkey). After a sort of church supper, the Apostle Paul commenced to lead the community in worship. This would have been like a combination Bible study and homily or sermon. But against all statistical probabilities that point to the safety of an event such as this, a tragic accident happened in the middle of the gathering.

Allow me to set the stage for this story with another incident that was reported in the *Tampa Bay Tribune*. It seems that a certain Rev. McDonald "gave one of the world's shortest sermons ever, on a Holy Humor Sunday like this one. Before beginning to preach, he announced from the pulpit that the focus of his sermon would be on sin. Then, leveling his gaze on the congregation he said, "Don't do it. Amen." Then he sat down.

Rev. McDonald's preaching style—at least in this particular case—is what you would call breviloquent. Yes, that is a real word. It means delivering a concise message with a minimum of speech.

If Paul's writings in the New Testament Epistles he authored are any indication of his preaching style, he was the exact opposite of breviloquent. Paul is famous for his use of marathon sentences that could run on and on and on. Paul must've been as long-winded in his delivery of sermons as he could be in his letter writing because it says that on his last night in Troas, he preached from supertime until dawn of the next day. And even then, he might have kept on going except that there was a boat waiting for him, to take him to the next stop on his missionary journey. But at around midnight something happened to interrupt his all-nighter of a homily.

There was, in the congregation, a young man named Eutychus. Eutychus means "Lucky". But poor Eutychus was anything but lucky on this night. He was perched on a window ledge listening to Paul preach, when he began to doze off. The scriptural account of this event, specifically mentions the many lamps that were burning in the room, so maybe it was not only

the late hour, or Paul's long-winded sermon, but the comfy atmosphere of the room, that made Eutychus drowsy.

Let's be honest, who hasn't struggled to stay awake in church at one time or another, just like Eutychus. Maybe you snored, or slumped in your pew, or drooled. But none of you ever fell out the window. That is what happened to Eutychus though. He fell out the window and it was a three-story fall to the ground. So, as you can imagine, worship came to an abrupt halt as the congregation rushed out into the street to give aid to poor unlucky Eutychus.

Sadly, for Eutychus, the fall was fatal. Lucky for Eutychus, Paul could not only preach up a storm; he also knew how to pray like nobody's business. The young man was made well and the scripture says the congregation "were not a little comforted." Which probably means they breathed a big sigh of relief. Not only for Eutychus' sake, but maybe with relief that they could all go home and get some sleep.

That could have been the end of the story except for the fact that Paul was not done with his sermon and since he was determined to finish it, he herded the whole bunch of them back up to the third floor where he picked up where he left off, and kept preaching until the sun came up in the morning and he sailed off to continue spreading the Good News.

In a way, this story presents a microcosm of where the Church finds itself in the middle of the COVID pandemic. A tragedy has moved us out of our sanctuaries and into the streets, to minister to victims and caregivers alike. And when the time comes for us to safely reconvene our worshipping and serving together—as Paul's congregation reassembled that night—we may be as changed as they were in our estimation of the Spirit's power working among us and through us.

So, if what we take from this story are guidelines on being nestled snugly in the .001% safety zone attributed to church attendance, then we might consider these pointers:

- When choosing a pew, avoid taking a window seat, and
- Whatever you do, get a good night's sleep and maybe a cup of coffee before coming to church.

And, while we all may be missing worshipping together in church during the pandemic; a positive of virtual worship is that, if the sermon puts you to sleep, at least you will be safe and comfortable in your chair or sofa.

Just don't get too comfy. We all want to see you back here when this is finally over. There's a new horizon of ministry awaiting us on the other side