



**Sermons from St. Marks  
United Church of Christ  
New Albany, Indiana**



**A Funny Story**

**Text: Acts**

**June 29, 2008**

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Can you imagine how many jokes I've heard over the years about preaching – jokes about long sermons.

Here's the thing, some are kind of funny and you laugh a little bit, but to me real life stories or real life observations are the best kind of humor that there is.

I chose this scripture this morning for a couple reasons – one is that it is a funny story and I love that there is humor in the Bible and secondly, I chose it because as I read it I really was wondering why in the world this got put into the Bible in the first place and what the point of it really was.

The story is so short and simple and it's so matter of fact. Paul is preaching for hours – not going over by 5 or 10 minutes – he's preaching for hours and a young man named Eutychus, estimated to be somewhere in his early teens, falls asleep in the windowsill of a third story building, he falls out of the window and dies.

Paul stops preaching, goes downstairs and finds the boy dead, brings him back to life and goes back upstairs and finishes preaching – going on until morning.

It's kind of funny how the Bible doesn't give a lot of details – it's just like – he fell asleep, falls, dies – there's no gasp from the crowd, nothing about his parents and others crying, nothing about everyone rushing downstairs with Paul, Paul says "there is life in him again", he goes back upstairs and it seems like it didn't occur to him that maybe he had talked long enough. Plus, if someone just died in worship and got brought back to life, would everyone really feel up to finishing the service.

Part of the funny thing about the story is that Paul is so matter of fact about it all.

Plus, it's funny because of all the work that went into deciding what would make it into the canon of the Bible, it was decided to put in a story about someone dying from sleeping during a sermon.

It's funny because we all know that it's not just a joke, but people really do sleep through sermons – you know it – you've probably done it some time in your life – and I certainly know it – I can see the snoozers from up here.

If you've never stood up in this pulpit, you should stand up here some time and you'll see what I mean – you can see everyone clear as a bell!

Maybe I'm naïve, but when I see one of you sleeping, I think – poor thing, didn't sleep well last night, or must have had a rough week, - I choose not to think it has anything to do with my sermon. I acknowledge that I could be wrong, but it works for me.

The thing is that the story doesn't really make any judgement or moral answer to the story – the boy isn't chastised for sleeping during the sermon, no comment is made that if he hadn't been sleeping, he wouldn't have died, Paul isn't told to wrap it up, he's not blamed for going on and go

and putting the lad to sleep— there's no constitutional amendment passed after that day that says sermons will not exceed 30 minutes – see how funny real life is – that's not a made up joke – that happened here at St. Marks – it's in our constitution – no sermon shall exceed 30 minutes and come on - there is no way that that is biblical.

Questions have been raised about whether the boy was really dead or just knocked unconscious. In Paul's day they certainly didn't have the knowledge of vital signs that we do today to know if someone is dead.

The meaning stays the same regardless.

Paul is preaching, he stops and takes care of the lad who slept through his sermon, he finishes preaching.

Most importantly though, Paul is actually giving us an example of what the church is like. I'll get back to that point in a minute.

The other thing that I like about this story is that it is in the book of Acts.

I don't really have 1 favorite book of the Bible, but if I did have to pick just one, it would probably be Acts because the book of Acts tells about how the church began.

I love the gospels because they have all the stories of Jesus, but the book of Acts tells how this group of Jesus followers started to organize themselves, started to worship together regularly – started a weekly pattern of coming together, it tells about churches popping up all over the place in the name of Jesus.

The reason it really blows my mind is because we know how the story ends – the churches keep growing and growing and growing and 2000 years later there are Christian churches all over the world – in parts of the world that the Apostle Paul and the early Christians didn't even know existed.

To me, the spreading of the church has always been the biggest miracle because it never stopped growing and spreading for 2000 years and even though there's a lot of talk about the difference of contemporary and traditional worship, the truth is that worship services all over the world for 2000 years are really all very similar.

A couple of weeks ago, my family was given an incredible gift by my parents – they took Todd and me and our boys on a trip to London and Paris. It was an amazing trip in so many ways.

One of the most awesome things that happened was on the Sunday that we were there.

We went to the evensong worship (like a vesper service) at Westminster Abbey at 3:00 in the afternoon.

I couldn't wait to see Westminster Abbey and then I'm sitting in Westminster Abbey listening to the incredible organ, listening to the choir singing and the acoustics in the place are amazing, and I'm looking at the beautiful stained glass windows and the high ceilings and arches and all the intricate design everywhere, imagining all of the weddings and funerals that have taken place there of royalty and so many others many of whom are buried inside.

There is really too much to take it all in and imagine all that has taken place there and then the choir and pastors process in and it's all beautiful and moving.

It's like another world and yet it's all so familiar – the scriptures are read from the same Bible so familiar words, the Apostles Creed and the Lord's Prayer are recited, anthems are sung, hymns are sung – mostly familiar ones – but not all are familiar, prayers are prayed for the Queen and the royal family, prayers are prayed for the poor and imprisoned and prayers are prayed for the United States who is in the process of electing a new President, the sermon is preached with a British accent by a woman preacher and then I start looking at my watch and it is now 3:30.

I started looking at my watch, not because she preached too long, but because I started thinking about the time change and realized that here at home, here at St. Marks it was exactly 5 hours earlier which meant that it was exactly 10:30 Sunday morning.

I wish I could fully explain what it felt like to be sitting in the Westminster abbey with all the amazing sights and sounds, worshipping in a very familiar way yet an ocean away from home and I was doing so at the exact time that all of you were sitting here listening to the morning prelude.

I could picture this sanctuary and all of you sitting here and I imagined all the places all over the world that were at worship and the realization is a time stopper – it feels like a miracle.

I said earlier that Paul is giving us an example of what the church can be like. That's what I like about the book of Acts. It's not just about words, it's about actions – the actions of the Apostles – the Acts of the Apostles. Not just what the early people said, but what they did. Paul didn't just talk about helping others, he stopped his sermon, helped the young man and then finished preaching.

Luke wrote the book of Acts to describe the success of the Holy Spirit in spreading the church. Acts is designed to show us how the church was and can be.

Throughout the book of Acts we learn that the qualities of a model church are that the church is -devoted to learning from the apostles

- a genuine and generous community
- the power of the Holy Spirit is visible
- worship and prayer
- conversion of non-believers
- thankful and sincere hearts

Now let's look at the church at Troas where Paul is speaking

Ideal church is Devoted to learning from the apostles - Church at Troas – the believers learned from Paul all night.

Ideal church has a genuine and generous community - Troas – believers gathered for a meal together.

The visible power of the Holy Spirit - Paul raised Eutychus from the dead combining words and actions.

Worship and prayer - Church at Troas prayed, preached and shared communion that night.

Conversion of non-believers - Eutychus was a pagan name leading us to believe that he had been converted to Christianity.

Thankful and sincere hearts - Church at Troas – the scripture said that the believers were greatly comforted by all that had happened.

The amazing miraculous thing is that through word and deed – word and actions – St. Marks has the opportunity to be the kind of church that Paul talked about too – we already are in many ways.

Think about us here at St. Marks – how are we doing and where can we work together to be even more faithful –

Devoted to learning from the apostles

Genuine and generous community

The power of the Holy Spirit is visible

Worship and prayer together

Conversion of non-believers  
Thankful and sincere hearts.

The story of the church gathering at Troas with Paul preaching all night comes at the end of the book of Acts.

Perhaps that was the biblical writer's way of reminding us that at the very end of acts – with much time gone by, the church is still continuing to act like the church.

What a wonderful and miraculous thing that while we struggle and make mistakes at times, we today at St. Marks and in churches around the world are continuing to be the church through word and deed in all that we do.

It's a whole lot more than just staying awake during the sermon!

Thanks be to God.