

The terrible horrible no good very bad sermon

By [David Williams](#)

June 6, 2014

It wasn't a particularly rushed morning, several Sundays ago.

I'd finished up the sermon, then putzed around with it for a few minutes as I always do before printing it up on a Sunday morning.

There's a final read-over, an edit here, an addition there, and I'm ready to go.

Some mornings, it's a mad rush, as I realize that I've botched a transition or failed to include something vital, which surfaces in my mind only at the very last minute. But I was generally pleased with the manuscript, which I'd dance in and out of as I moved through the message. There were the jokes, the images, the transitions, and the results of my review of scholarly commentaries, all woven up together. I was content.

I went upstairs, showered, snagged another cup of coffee, and then went back downstairs to the study and hit print. Out came the pages, one-two-three-four, single-spaced, 1,600 words and change.

I snagged them from the printer as soon as they printed out, then bounded upstairs. I dropped them in my bag, suited up, and got on my bike to motor to church.

The adult ed study went well, as we wrapped up 13 weeks of studying Paul's Seven Letters.

I bopped into my office with five minutes to go before worship, put on robe and stole and cross, and popped open my bag. Out came the sermon manuscript.

It was a sermon. But it was not *the* sermon.

It was the sermon from the *previous* week, which—as I discovered later—had still been spooled up in the buffer for the printer. The actual sermon must have printed about ten seconds later, where it sat patiently all Sunday long wondering why I hadn't picked it up.

Ack.

I reviewed my options. Four minutes to worship. The sermon was in the cloud, in my Google drive. I could get to it. Only . . . I didn't have my laptop. Hmm. Surely, surely I could access that through the browser on my iPhone.

I attempted this, sitting there in my office, but something wasn't working. I tried again, as I sat there in the sanctuary. Still not working. Ack. I found myself coveting, for a moment, an Android phone.

My music director finished the prelude, and nodded and smiled as she does to let me know to get my behind out there. I went to welcome folks into the worship. I was preoccupied, and could feel it distancing me.

During the first readings, I tried again to get to the sermon, but for some reason, it would only bring up an account affiliated with my older son's schoolwork. I found a workaround, and got to my Google account, but then—with ten seconds to go before I'd lead the time with children—the browser crashed.

Ack, again.

And so in the all-too-short hymn before the sermon, my mind fished for the words I had used. They were there, somewhere. The echo of my writing remained, but it was imperfect. How had I said that? How had I started? How had I worked that transition?

I can do off-the-cuff or improvisational preaching. That, I'm comfortable with. It's energizing.

But my mind was still on the words that weren't quite there. I struggled through the message, I'd remember that I'd forgotten to say this, or forgotten to say that. I was not in the moment or non-anxious, and I could feel it distorting and interfering with my connection to the good folks of my little church. They were trying gamely to stay with me, they were, but it just wasn't happening.

Because to preach the Word, you have to be present in it.

Sigh. There're always more Sundays.

*Originally posted at [Beloved Spear](#)*