

On not preaching (as often)

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I've been an associate minister for two years. I love associate ministry. While I understand that it is a stepping stone for a lot of people, I feel deeply called to this role--both in general and in the specific context of the church I serve.

I used to be in solo ministry. When I made the transition, there were surprisingly few bumps--in large part due to my wonderful colleagues. And one of the big differences between solo and staff ministry is the increase in opportunities to work collaboratively.

Another is that I no longer preach every Sunday. I loved preaching every Sunday. It was this incredible crucible for me: from age 25 to 30, I studied the scriptures, wrote a sermon and delivered it to a community of faith. Every single week (less a handful for vacations and maternity leave and a cantata here or there).

But I also love *not* preaching every Sunday. I love that I get to hear colleagues preach, that I have time for other pastoral ministries, and that I have more words left over for other writing.

This Easter, I did experience a wisp of something like nostalgia--perhaps even grief--when it settled in a little deeper that associates very rarely preach on the big feast days. It was helpful to name this--and to process it with my senior colleague, lest it become a source of resentment. Preaching was the first role of church leadership that really clicked for me; I identified as a preacher before I identified as a pastor.

I've had to re-imagine my identity to fit my new vocation.

But less-frequent preaching has a more significant ramification as well. When I preached every week, sermon preparation was--for better or for worse--my primary spiritual practice. Out of necessity and habit, I spent quite a bit of time struggling with God and thinking about Jesus and listening to the Spirit. There was a sort of ongoing exchange, which peaked every Sunday, among the most marvelous conversation partners: Christ and culture and community and commentaries.

I miss the intensity of that engagement. I still read the Bible, but there is a huge difference between reading the Bible to preach and doing it to prepare for a reading in worship or even a Bible study. The preacher is desperate to find the movement of the Holy Spirit in the text, because she has to be able to dance to that rhythm by Sunday morning.

Again: I have no doubt that this is where I am called to be. The answer is definitely not to simply preach more. But I do miss meeting Jesus the way I did in weekly sermon preparation. I'm actually kind of excited to say that, because this isn't the first time I've discerned a spiritual hunger. Invariably, once I do this, an unimaginably wonderful feast is set and I'm delighted, once again, to taste and see the goodness of God.

*A version of this post previously appeared on [Pershey's blog](#).*