

March 4, 2007  
Lucky To Be Alive  
Acts 20:7-12

Eutychus will forever be remembered as the guy who dozed off during a sermon and fell three stories out of a window. It's sort of a funny story, really. A long-winded preacher combined with a young man who has just eaten dinner--deadly combination. True, Eutychus is not one of the great heroes of the Bible, but neither is he an idiot; he is just an ordinary person, not a lot different from any of us. I suppose we laugh at the story because it hits all too close to home. Thankfully, church pews are not too high off the ground! Maybe that's why churches are never built on the second floor!

I, for one, sympathize with poor Eutychus. It was a warm evening and he had just finished off the best roast beef and apple pie in Troas. Perhaps all the chairs were taken so he had made himself comfortable beside a window to catch a breeze from what little night air there was. He was probably anxious to hear Paul preach, had probably waited all day for this very moment. I can almost imagine how excited he was as Paul began explaining scriptures. And Paul preached on and on and on. In fact, the passage tells us that Paul was still preaching at midnight. Wow! I don't know when Paul started preaching but my guess is that he had been at it for at least two hours. Finally, the young man could fight it no longer. He closed his eyes for just an instant and then before he knew it, Paul was doing mouth to mouth. He probably had wanted a close relationship with the great apostle, but this was a bit ridiculous.

Did you notice that Paul continued to talk until daybreak? All night long this guy preached. It makes staying awake for a twenty-five minute sermon seem like a piece of cake. The New Revised Standard Version tells us Paul was holding a "discussion," a much better translation of the Greek than the word "talk" in the NIV. "Talk" sort of sounds like an after dinner speech or maybe even a "pep talk." I thought at first the story of Eutychus turns Paul's preaching into a kind of comedy. But that is not at all what Luke is trying to convey. I don't think Luke meant for it to be a funny story. Here's why.

Paul was leaving the next day, continuing his journey to Jerusalem, and he didn't know when he would have opportunity to talk to these young Christians again. So much at stake:

Don't call this an after dinner speech or even a pep talk! Paul understood his "discussion" as the difference between life and death.

I've been at the hospital on more than one occasion when a code blue sounded. I've seen nurses and doctors and technicians running and moving as if someone's life depended on it because someone's life was hanging in the balance. All the talents and gifts these medical people possessed were channeled into saving a life. And that's the way it should be. Life is precious.

Paul, too, was fighting against death. He was working to save people from spiritual death, just as deadly, no, far more deadly than mere physical death. "Do not fear those who can destroy the body," Jesus said. "Fear those who can destroy the soul." Paul believed that in his preaching he was fighting against all the powers of evil marshaled against him.

I wonder if that's what we believe we are doing here on Sunday morning? Is a sermon just a little talk, an after dinner speech, sometimes a little long-winded, or is it the difference between life and death?

We know from earlier examples of Paul's preaching in Acts what he was "discussing." No doubt he was reasoning from the scriptures and teaching about the Spirit and the Kingdom of God. Over and over again Paul spoke of Jesus Christ and how incredible that God had become a man. For Paul this was not just "talking;" this was spiritual warfare. He was battling against the powers of darkness and no less than the souls of human beings were at stake.

If so much were on the line, then how in the world could Eutychus possibly have nodded off to sleep? Great spiritual moments are seldom recognized until long after they are over. I've often wondered why the disciples who accompanied Jesus that night before his crucifixion fell asleep while Jesus prayed. How could these men have slumbered while our Lord prayed and agonized over the sins of the world? But they did. They drifted off to sleep while our Lord endured the most difficult night of his life alone.

The disciples of Jesus were in a garden but poor Eutychus was on the third floor. When his chin hit his chest, he fell out the window and hit the ground. Paul stopped preaching but just long enough to run down stairs and bring the dead Eutychus back to life. What is unbelievable is that Luke doesn't dwell on the miracle! Paul doesn't walk around banging on his chest and proclaiming himself a miracle worker. He makes no fuss at all about what has happened. As soon as Eutychus starts breathing, Paul runs back upstairs, has a bite to eat, and then begins preaching again. Amazing!

While the reader may be in awe over the miracle, Luke is interested in Paul's preaching. Sure, bringing the dead back to life is important but equally as important is the preaching and teaching of the Gospel. Luke wants us to understand that the preaching and teaching of scripture is the central task of the church, but must be linked with compassion for the sick and hurting.

The story of Eutychus provides much food for thought. While most of us focus on the life of a man who was brought back to life, for Luke there is a dual emphasis: teaching of the Gospel and healing. Jesus was both a preacher and teacher and healer. In other words, Luke in the story of Eutychus helps us to see that Jesus came to proclaim God's Word and to be God's Word in the world.

In these verses Paul not only preaches God's Word, but he, too, in his act of caring for Eutychus, reveals God's presence in the world. What this text shows in a remarkable way is that the *preaching and teaching of God's Word* go hand in hand

with *being God's Word*. In other words, *learning* scripture can never be divorced from *living* scripture. What we learn on Sunday must be lived throughout the rest of the week.

My wife and my staff will tell you that I love food. I don't really have a huge appetite but I enjoy experimenting with different recipes and trying my hand at being a chef. Can you imagine going to a store and buying all the ingredients for a great meal but never fixing it? It would not take long before all the fresh fruits and vegetables and meat would spoil. If what we learn on Sunday is not lived on Monday, it soon goes to waste.

Scripture that is only learned but not lived becomes filled with intolerance and judgmental attitudes. Too much of Christianity is noted for what it is against and not what it is for. In a scene from *The Simpson's*, Homer pays a visit to his neighbor who tells Homer that they have just returned from a Christian camp. Homer is curious about the camp and asks, "What did you learn at the camp?" His neighbor replies without a moment's hesitation, "We learned how to be more judgmental." Unfortunately, too many people come to church and learn how to be more judgmental. Mahatma Gandhi once said, "I love Jesus. It's his people I can't stand." Scripture must move from the head to the heart—so close, yet so far.

John Ortberg, in one of his books tells the story of a man named "Hank." Hank was a member of the church where Ortberg serves as pastor. It seems that Hank was a mean-spirited, critical man who was always finding fault with something. He never missed a service and paid his tithe right on time but as far as being a loving and kind man, well, he was light years away. Pastor Ortberg said that what was really sad is that the church didn't really expect anything different from Hank. No one really considered that Hank would ever change. The church had no expectations that Hank would change.

How unfortunate that the church doesn't expect people to change. Isn't that the purpose of the church to make disciples? Isn't the job of the church to teach scripture in order for people to become like Jesus? If people attend church Sunday after Sunday but aren't being developed and formed into the image of Christ, then something is desperately wrong. Wouldn't you agree?

In chapter 12 of Romans Paul wrote: "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." In Greek thought mind and heart and soul were all tied up together. (Mind is a synonym for person.) The word "transformed" is intriguing. We derive the word metamorphosis from it—a change of form from one thing into another, like a caterpillar into a butterfly. Paul writes that we are not to remain as we were but we are to be morphed into something new and beautiful that affects our mind, soul and heart, our whole being. Wow! Are you being morphed into God's new creation?

How do you know whether you are being morphed into God's new creation? Answer: Are you growing in your love for others? Love alone is what marks us as God's children. Without love, Paul says in I Cor. 13, everything is just a lot of noise.