

## *A Stop by Quiet Waters*

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### *“Worship Services & Snow Storms”*

You spent several hours this week studying, researching and praying over the message for Sunday morning. It hadn't come easy but you believed you had a word from God for your congregation, and you were eager to give it. After all this is the primary reason you are in the ministry – to preach the word. You had carefully put together this series of messages leading up to Christmas, each one was an important part of the whole. But as you woke up this morning you were faced with a preacher's greatest fear, you were going to have to cancel the service. The snow storm couldn't have picked a worse time to hit, in the early hours of Sunday morning. The roads weren't plowed let alone the church parking lot. The question arose, “Why did God let this happen to you and to the rest of the body of Christ all over New England?” Quickly you stuffed it, but it was there nonetheless. Didn't God understand how important that service was?

In addition to the frustration of not being able to preach you also feared what the loss of a Sunday's income would do to an already tight church budget. In fact, if you were totally honest with yourself you might have to admit this was greater than the frustration of not being able to preach. Experience has taught you that many of your people will not make it up at the next service.

These are some of the things I felt as a pastor in New England. In thirty-eight years of pastoral ministry in a local church I can only remember canceling church one time. There were several times I should have but my pride wouldn't let me. The first snow storm that challenged me was Christmas Eve 1965. I had been at that church only a few months but had introduced a Thanksgiving Eve service which was well attended. Now I was initiating a Christmas Eve communion service. But by late afternoon we already had several inches of snow on the ground and over a foot predicted before it would be over. I couldn't cancel that service, what would people think of me. In addition to my wife and two little boys there were just four other people. But I hadn't cancelled it!

Then there was the time I walked ½ mile to the church because the roads were snow clogged. Only one deacon showed up. I was foolish to not cancel the service that morning, but at the time I felt spiritually superior to the other pastors in town who cancelled their services. I was really committed to Christ and the ministry while others wimped out. I felt I had to continue the work of the kingdom of God regardless of the weather.

It was years before I could concede my real problem, I defined the work of the kingdom as primarily that of preaching and teaching the word of God! This was what I was called to do and gifted for. I fulfilled many roles as a pastor, but to me everything else in the life of the church was secondary to preaching. Within the worship service everything else was secondary to preaching the word.

It was while on a sabbatical in 1991 that the Lord began to confront me with my warped perspective on my role in the church. As I visited congregations around the country I discovered what the Spirit of God was doing with body ministry during the week and with church services,

and I was ashamed and humiliated by my attitude towards my view of myself as being the most important person and doing the most important thing in the church.

In the first service after returning from the sabbatical I publicly apologized to the congregation for misleading them into thinking that the preached word was the most significant thing in a worship service. I explained that there were three things which were equally important, worship, prayer, and preaching the word, and that from now on we were going to give adequate time for each and learn how to worship and pray in our services as well as listen to the preached word.

I made another personal adjustment as well, I let go of my drive to be a great preacher and began to focus on other important roles I had as Senior Pastor. I didn't spend less time or energy in sermon preparation, but my attitude was different. I was more than a preacher, I was a pastor and there were other very important roles for me to play, roles which could only be fulfilled during the week, not on Sunday morning.

I still didn't cancel Sunday services for snow storms, but only because the weather was never so bad on a Sunday morning that we needed to cancel. I was ready to do so if necessary. There were those Sundays when the weather was bad enough that attendance was about half what it would otherwise have been, but that was alright too. We could still worship and pray and feed on the word of God. As for the finances, those too, were in the hands of God, for I was coming to really believe that, "*My God would supply all our needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.*" The work of the kingdom of God consists of so much more than just preaching on a Sunday morning. That is a part of it, for preachers an important part, but just a part nonetheless.

So my brother or sister if you had to cancel your worship service this morning, that's alright. You missed an opportunity to worship and pray with your congregation and to feed them from the word of God, but that's alright too. Knowing preachers as I do I'm convinced you and your family had a wonderful time being a house church as my wife and I did this morning. You also had an opportunity to rest and be renewed. A week full of ministry still awaits you as you are many things to your people, and they'll be blessed in different ways as you rub shoulders with them in the next several days. Oh, by the way, our Father in heaven knows all about your church budget, and he knows all you need to carry on the work he has called you to will be there when it's needed. Why, one time he even used a fish to provide the needed tax money for one of his disciples.

Peace and joy in Christ,  
Dick