

Cry As Long As You Want To Cry
Revelation 21:4

Have you ever heard or read a sermon that irritated you, aggravated you, annoyed you, bothered you, didn't sit well with you?

If a sermon has ever sat on your mind like Wedgewood chili sits on your stomach, say Amen.

I know I'm over using the chili analogy but I nearly died the day of that last chili contest and feel I earned the right to use the chili analogy as often as I want to.

Well, it should not be surprising that sermons can be irritating because preachers can be irritating themselves.

Did I hear somebody say amen under their breath?

Irritating sermon delivered by irritating preacher. There could be a connection I guess.

Well, I, myself have been irritated by a sermon, a sermon I read, but did not hear, a sermon preached by someone I'm told is a pretty nice fellow. I mean as far as I know he didn't go to Duke or anything as bad as that. Actually, this preacher man has a reputation of being a gifted preacher, a good thinker, and a fine person. I wouldn't know. I've never met him. But I like to give people the benefit of the doubt---well, most of the time, I do---and so I am willing to venture that Charles E. Poole is right up there at the top of the preaching profession and right up there up at the top of personhood. But-----but Rev. Charles Poole preached a sermon that for years has gotten underneath my skin, has rubbed me the wrong way, has ticked me off. The book in which I read this troublesome sermon is a collection of sermons by Charles. And wouldn't you know it, Charles used the sermon title of the sermon I do not like for the title of the book. Yes he did. Which doubly irritates me. It seems every time I look for a book on my bookshelf I see this title.

Now it may be the case that I am one of those individuals who is easily irritated. God help and bless my dear wife for living with me. I can get ticked off. I can be-----well, I better not use that word in the pulpit---I can be difficult. But factoring all that in I still say this Charles Poole sermon, while it is not a zero, could be greatly improved.

And I tell you why I say this. The title of the sermon and the title of the book is "Don't Cry Past Tuesday." That might not irritate you right off the bat. It didn't me either. But let that title sit with you a few seconds let that title come before you as a loved one is dying and see if it doesn't upset your system. Don't cry past Tuesday. Ummmmm. Really. I have to stop crying by Tuesday at midnight.

Charles Poole got the sermon title and the book title from a story about a deacon named J. W. Spruce. Mr. Spruce died in April of 1956. He was a deacon at Corinth Primitive Baptist Church on Beech Avenue in Macon, Georgia. Deacon Spruce woke up early one morning with an awful

heaviness in his chest, a pain that was a sign, an omen of his forthcoming, imminent death. Mr. Spruce's daughter wept as she knelt by his side. Looking into her tear-streaked face, J. W. offered her some advice, advice Charles Poole thinks was great advice, advice I think was awful advice.

Mr. Spruce spoke these words to his daughter on his death bed. "I can't tell you not to weep. I'd cry too, if it was you who was dying. I know you need to cry. But this is Friday morning. So whatever you do, don't cry past Tuesday."

What do you think? Is that good advice or bad advice?

If I were handing out advice to people crying, weeping, sobbing at my bedside, people distraught and flipping out and losing it because they were going to miss me, wonderful me, so much, miss my fun-loving way, miss my irreverence, miss my biscuits, miss-----ahhhhhhhhhhh, if they were crying because they were going to miss something about me, then I would say, Hey, you just cry your little eyes out. I'd miss me too. If I had to miss somebody like me I might never stop crying so you just cry for forty days and forty nights. That's biblical. And after that, why don't you cry about losing me every other day for five years. And then, and only then you might want to reevaluate and just cry for me once a week for the rest of your life.

Seriously, I'd say, whether it's my death or anybody else's death---I'd say cry as long as you want to cry. Cry when you need to cry. For Christ's sake and your sake and all the sake of the people around you, be human. Be real. Be vulnerable. Be a crier.

That's what I would say.

In Charles Poole's defense, he does comment in his sermon that grief is like a long, slow, bewildering, multi-tempoed waltz. And Poole is right, we have to-----we have to come to terms with reality and we have to get to the point where our lives are not dominated by, paralyzed by grief. That's all true. But "don't cry past Tuesday" is not the way to say it. The way to say it is cry when you want to cry but don't in the long run, for the long haul, don't let crying define who you are, define your existence. Still cry if you need to but let God heal your heart to the point that your life is not plastered with crying.

Charles Poole says we can live beyond our pain. He says we do not have to cry forever. I don't believe that for a second. Grief pain, emotional pain never-----never completely goes away. Time does not heal all wounds. Time does not heal anything. It does take time, though. It takes longer than Tuesday. Not longer for Tuesday for the tears to stop forever, but longer than Tuesday for us not to drown in our tears.

Have you ever felt like you were drowning in tears?

Have you ever just gotten tired of crying?

Don't ever forget this, tears are forever. Crying is forever. Well, Revelation 21:4 says there will be no tears in heaven so I guess I'll say tears are forever on this earth. Tears, even after we get

over the hump, tears will happen. At times, when we least expect it we can get stung by grief or some painful memory and once again we will cry, cry because we need to cry, cry because we have it cry, cry because it is the human thing to do.

And Charles Poole acknowledges that. He writes that grief comes and goes and comes again. But if that is true you shouldn't ever-----ever say "Don't cry past Tuesday." And if that is true you should never preach a sermon with that title or have a sermon collection book with that title. Amen!

Well, as you know, my dad is getting close to drawing his last breath. It's been a hard week and I expect next week to be even harder and who knows if there will be a week after that. During this time I have not tried to keep my faith. Frankly, I'm not sure what keeping my faith would entail. I don't anticipate losing my faith, not the type of faith I have anyway which is not necessarily a so-called strong faith----I don't even like that phrase----but I would say an honest faith, a real faith, a faith which allows me to fuss and fume and be mad at God and have doubts and be angry about prostate cancer and all manner of things. So I haven't been trying to keep the faith because losing it, losing my kind of faith does really seem to be a possibility.

And I haven't tried to be strong either, whether it be strong for my mother, or strong for my family, or strong for this church. What would being strong entail? Not grieving? Not crying? Not being human? Not hurting? That doesn't seem strong to me. That seems like denial.

When I went to be with my mother last Wednesday she was sitting in the den with my crazy Aunt Lillie and the thing that helped my mother the most actually was that I and Aunt Lillie cried with her.

I sent out an email this past weekly letting everyone know the situation and communicating that one way yall could help me would be to do as we do ninety percent of the time here at Wedgewood and that is you could help me by participating in the worship service, saying prayers, reading scripture, and leading litanies. I did that because right now I'm feeling a bit raw, I'm hurting and the more I talk during worship the more chance I will cry. Now crying in worship is not bad. It's just that we're liberal Baptists and if I start crying I might not stop any time soon and I know yall liberals like to get out in an hour.

Have you ever felt like if you started crying you might not stop crying?

I sent out that email about not wanting to cry the entire service not because I think ministers should not cry during a worship service but because I don't think a worship service should be dominated by my tears. It's not just about me. The fact of the matter is yall have a lot of cry about too. There are enough things to cry about in our personal lives that if we let everybody take turns and cry we might not not only get out in an hour we might not get out for a week.

We have enough tears to float several oceanliners.

And our tears are going to be with us until our last day on this earth. Tuesday is not long enough for us. And I guess that's what I was saying in the email, please don't expect me to stop crying any time soon. And I want expect you to stop crying any time soon either.

Here at Wedgewood we have a deacon ministry. It is caring ministry. 99.9 percent of what deacons do is caring. They have one and only one administrative duty. At Wedgewood we have a caring deacon ministry because folk like you and me have a lot to cry about.