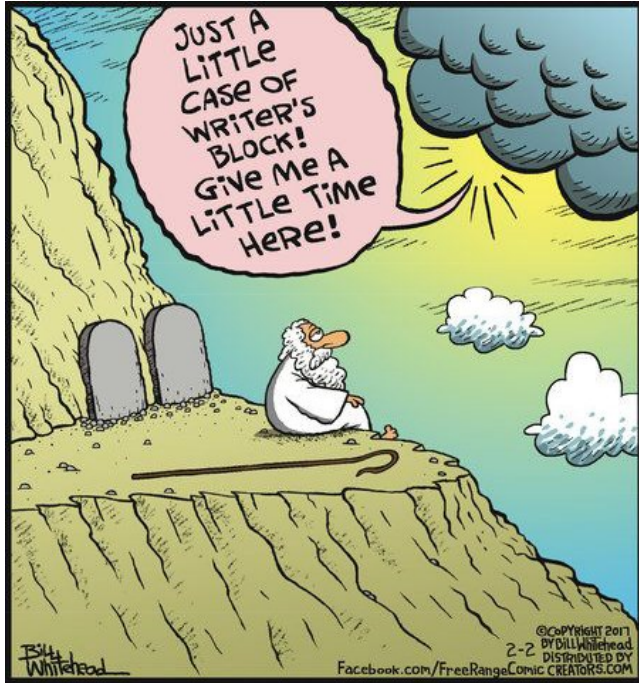


# On Writer's Block



It's a story that I know all too well.

In a moment of pure inspiration and creative genius, I picked my scripture and sermon topic weeks ago. The logic for this choice of scriptures made perfect sense at the time. And it was going to be epic. Transformational. Truly inspired.

But now, weeks later, when I finally sit down in front of a blank screen, the mind goes blank. Words refuse to come. Thoughts will only emerge in fragments.

And it is Saturday night and Sunday morning is going to come *really* early. So coffee is out of the question.

Anyone else know this story? Just me?

When I was in seminary, my favorite class was a small preaching seminar with retired United Methodist pastor Rev. Belton Joyner. For several weeks, Joyner spent the first few minutes of class every day adding to a growing list: "Ways to overcome sermon writer's block." I am not going to share the whole list here (because my notes from that class are still buried somewhere in a pile of unpacked boxes from my last move), but I would like to share a few of his more memorable suggestions.

- ◆ **Just put words on paper.** Any words. Your grocery list. Your to-do list. Nonsensical stream-of-consciousness fragments. Let go of the need to form coherent thoughts and pithy turns-of-phrase. Eventually, the inspiration will begin to flow freely again and you can throw away your "scratch paper."
- ◆ **Spend some time with young children.** Notice how much fun they have in "experimenting" with the power of words. Notice the words and sounds that the kids take particular delight in – and then find a way to weave a few fun words into your sermon – "bubble" or "kerfuffle" or "goosebump."
- ◆ **Go out to dinner and eavesdrop** on the conversation at the next table over. Find a way to work that conversation into your sermon.
- ◆ **Take your laptop out into an open field.** Take off your shoes and feel the grass underneath your feet. Dip your toes into a flowing stream. Notice the colors and smells and sounds around you. Stick out your tongue and catch a raindrop, or pick and eat a wild raspberry, or blow a dandelion puff. Then write your sermon outside.
- ◆ **Imagine telling the story from the perspective of** the youngest child in your church. Or the oldest saint. Or the most cranky curmudgeon. Or the most baffled outsider.

Sometimes, when we are looking for inspiration, we can find ourselves virtually crippled by "tunnel vision." But sometimes, the most profound epiphanies come from the most unlikely sources: from fragmented thoughts, playful words, bizarre conversations. So may we all find moments of uncanny inspiration from a surprising source this week. And in our surprise, may we draw closer to the heart of God.

## Question for Reflection:

**When you find yourself in a "slump" or a "dry spell," where do you most naturally turn for inspiration and joy?**