

Life's Too Short

By Talbot Davis – January 28, 2020

<https://wesleyancovenant.org/2020/01/27/lifes-too-short/>

I spent most of my childhood and adolescence pursuing a two-fold dream: one, to become the Texas state champion in tennis for kids my age; and two, to use that state championship as a catapult into a pro tennis career. While dream number one ultimately did happen, you may be able to ascertain from the fact that I am writing this article, dream number two most assuredly did not.

I tell you that to let you know that my early years of tennis development featured a great deal of temper-losing, racket-throwing, obscenity-shouting *anger*. Whether in practice or in matches, I played in a constant state of frustration – angry at myself, my opponent, my racket, my fate. Anger and frustration fueled whining and moaning.

Until a coach very calmly said, “*Talbot, life’s too short.*”

That’s it. That’s all. *Life’s too short.*

Life is too short to spend it frustrated and distracted. Tennis is too hard to waste all that time and energy being angry. To reach whatever potential I had, I needed to realize that life was too short to waste in a state of perpetual anger. *Life’s too short.*

As I process through the “Protocol Of Reconciliation And Grace Through Separation,” a proposal from 16 diverse United Methodist Church leaders, what my tennis coach said so long ago is still true: life’s too short. In spite of the protocol’s imperfections, regardless of traditionalists’ understandable question of, “*If we win the GC votes (13-0!) why are we the ones doing more of the “leaving”?*” No matter all the *coulda, woulda, shouldas* of the last 50 years, the fact remains: life is too short to remain in an intractable, unwinnable war with our denominational adversaries. Life is too short to spend it distracted and diverted away from our primary mission. Life is too short to waste a minute more of it in a state of perpetual anger.

Because here is a secret that I have come to realize about myself in the midst of this Methodist debate. It is true of me and I suspect it is true of many of you: I *liked* being angry. I have been *energized* by this debate. I enjoyed identifying with my particular tribe and being identified by my opponents. My adrenaline flowed when I heard about the latest outrage or read the most recent affront. “*Did you hear ...?*” and “*Can you believe?*” became staples of my indignation-fueled Metho-speak. I was angry, and in retrospect, I liked it.

And zingers? Oh, did I have some zingers. Some of them I tweeted, others of them I Facebooked, and still others I turned into slightly more thoughtful shots across the denominational bow. With titles like “[Reuniting Christology And Sexology](#)” and “[When Therapy Becomes Theology](#)” I put together arguments that I was *sure* would persuade many of my centrist and progressive friends to see the error of their ways and embrace the beauty of a robust sexual orthodoxy. And what happened? I made a few friends, earned some more enemies, and maintained my state of righteous indignation. I went to meetings, took part in debates, strategized for annual conference elections. I suppose I encouraged the few and offended the many. I saw it as my job to ensure that The United Methodist Church did not codify heresy by redefining marriage and reinterpreting the standards for ordination. Doctrinal purity was my mission, anger was my fuel, and *that’s the way, uh-huh, uh-uh, I liked it.*

But now I know better. *Life’s too short* to waste being angry.

Because here is a simple truth: I cannot be in a denomination that redefines marriage. And our progressive friends cannot be in a denomination that does not. There is no way forward when you start from that particular square one. My zingers and my shots across the bow changed the minds of precisely no one.

With that realization, the protocol is a gift. Depending on your annual conference or even your congregation, the process may be difficult. But the payoff will be glorious: a new expression of the Methodist movement, fueled no longer by our anger but by our alignment. Known less for what we are fighting against than by who we are fighting for. And we will not have to file a single lawsuit or surrender a piece of property to get there.

We can leave behind a season of frustration and enter an era of proclamation. We get to proclaim a beautiful plan that encompasses both sex and salvation – yes, they’re connected, in the same way I Corinthians 6 and I Corinthians 15 are part of the same book! – and we get to do so alongside people we know, respect, and love. Free of anger, full of the Spirit, forming together what my friend Chris Ritter calls “the passionate ranks of the sexually restrained.”

Because life is too short, and eternity is too long to spend another minute in anger that we could spend in ministry.

The Rev. Talbot Davis is the Senior Pastor at Good Shepherd Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. Abingdon Press has published five of his sermon series into books: Head Scratchers; The Storm Before the Calm; The Shadow of a Doubt; Solve; and Crash Test Dummies: Surprising Lessons from the Book of Judges. His sixth book, a text on preaching called Simplify The Message; Multiply The Impact releases from Abingdon on February 4 wherever books are sold online.