

Wired

by Sheila Luecht

Like a bunch of magpies on a telephone wire, every Sunday morning it was the same thing. Squawking and chattering church members all stuffing themselves into the front door, at the very last minute before service. Walking in and sitting together, families and friends, with an occasional stranger in the midst. The music from the ancient organ would be cranked too loud and the woman playing it, trying desperately to let everyone know she was playing.

The pastor, who knew most people there for over 30 years, was a gentle kind of man. He did make everyone feel welcome, but time, his service and these people were just wearing him out. I used to feel a bit sorry for him. Slowly it just got to be too much. He started trying to make more and more people take responsibility. He kept delegating and absolving himself of things. Then one day he just surprised everyone.

He got up to the pulpit and said that he thought he might have made a mistake. I will never forget the desperate look on his face. He recalled being at his Ivy League school and wondering just what he was interested in upon his graduation and what would be next in his life. He listened to a mentor and he ended up being a minister. He regretted it now, looking back, trying to imagine the road untraveled. He would have had a career which he could have profited from, made decent money off of and retired in his old age securely, or so he believed.

I will never forget how that all sounded. He actually sounded pained. Nothing he could say after that made much sense. He had spent his last bit of sacred credit with many of us just then, because his role was forever changed. He was a good man, but a man who had given up on himself. Years of being there for everyone else had finally taken their toll. All that he had kept inside seemed to vanish away

and strangely get sprayed on all of us. Somehow we needy people were to blame for his collapse of confidence. It was a very sad thing to witness.

Somehow the church windows were a bit less vibrant in their stained glass, there was no more sun to lighten them up. This church was the oldest in the county, people believed so hard in it and it's survival that they did without to preserve it. They fixed the roof, and sat by an old stove in winter to keep warm, careful not to put their feet in the hole in the floor, they sacrificed over all the years to keep it going to give it new life, over and over and over. The very breath of those faithful people heaved a sigh from their graves. What was this happening to their beloved place?

Generations of people did not quit it, to keep it a spiritual home for the generations yet to come. Yet here we were staring back at a man at the pulpit who was just after all, a man. A sad man, a disappointed man.

In this religion you weren't an anointed one, no kind of god on earth. You were a man ministering to the needs of men and women. You were a go between, a guide and a religious mentor. At that moment it was all kind of washed away, made insignificant, made unreal by the man who had himself ministered so long, to so many.

He did not find pride in it, he in fact questioned it and every single thing that he once believed in so heartily. We sat transfixed as if for days. Some cried, sobbing into their tissues. Others, grim, felt anger and confusion. In the end it was not resolved. We can never know exactly what drove it all, an incident, a true disappointment, a lack of funds for something much desired, but it began the end of him as the spiritual leader. They tried to replace him, seven times.

In all that confusion some of the wickedest people came forward in the church to seize the power he had once had and begun out of desperation to delegate. It was a season of angst and unrest.

We left, he left and all who were left were forced to build again. It is now some ten years later. The last pastor chosen has been there a few years. We can only see what we can see from the outside. The magpies are still on the wire and we are only to happy to be free of their incessant chatter.

