

WHEN YOUR PREACHER LEAVES: Interim Services for Churches Between Ministers

January, 2010, #42



Jerrie Barber and John Parker



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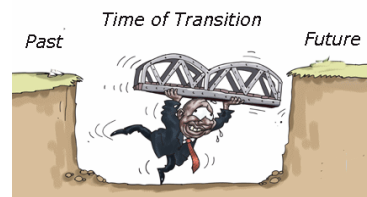
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When Might an Interim Minister Be Helpful?

by Jerrie Barber

The concept of having a preacher for a planned short time after a long ministry is foreign to many people. To some members of the church, if we don't have a full-time preacher with a long-term commitment, we are "spinning our wheels." Many churches have done well without an intentional interim. On the other hand, many preachers have been hurt and many congregations have suffered because the leaders hurriedly selected a man who became an *unintentional* interim – a preacher who was brought in after a long and successful ministry of a good faithful preacher or after a period of conflict in the congregation and was soon rejected through no fault of his own.



When might it be good to bring in a trained preacher who will agree to stay for a limited time (six to eighteen months on average), who will give stability in the pulpit, and who will prepare the church for the next full-time preacher?

Ronald G. Brown wrote this in an article on *Intentional Interim*:

An Intentional Interim Minister is needed if a church finds itself in one or more of the following situations:

1. The minister served seven or more years before leaving,
2. The minister resigned under pressure (a forced termination),
3. The minister's resignation was requested due to ethical or moral misconduct,
4. The minister departed in the midst of severe conflict within the church,
5. The church has not conducted a self-study of its structure, history, priorities, mission or vision in the last five years, or

The church has a pattern of the last two ministers leaving after having served the church for only 2-3 years (Ronald G. Brown, © *Intentional Interim* is copyrighted by Interim Ministry Network, Inc., Baltimore, MD).

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

"If your eye is single" (Matthew 6:23)

by John Parker

A Midsummer Night's Dream is a play about vision, and Shakespeare's was keener and deeper than that of all but a few writers. Ironically, what he especially saw so clearly was how limited and foggy most people's sight and judgment are. Limited intelligence hinders some, of course, but most are near-sighted or double-visioned from pride, love, hate, ambition, greed, or lust. He treats the most destructive of these distortions in the tragedies, but this comedy is centered on misapprehension from love and imagination. Again, though, Shakespeare's picture has more than one dimension: sometimes a narrow focus has good effects.



Principal Characters

Theseus, Duke of Athens who is marrying Hippolyta

Egeus, strict father of Hermia

Lysander and Demetrius, suitors to Hermia

Hermia, in love with Lysander

Helena, in love with Demetrius

Bottom, a weaver who is transformed by the fairies

Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons who marries Theseus

Oberon, king of the fairies and husband of Titania

Titania, queen of the fairies who is charmed into loving Bottom

Puck, mischievous fairy who serves Oberon

The Play

Theseus, Duke of Athens, is preparing to marry Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons, in four days, so he's ordered up plenty of merriments and "the pert and nimble spirit of mirth." Suddenly though an old citizen named Egeus comes fretting in, with his daughter Hermia and her suitors Lysander and Demetrius in tow. Classic generation conflict here: Hermia wants to marry Lysander; Egeus wants her to marry Demetrius. These boys really seem about equal in value as husband material, but this is Athens, and daddy gets to decide.

Faced with agreeing to marry Demetrius, becoming a nun, or being executed by the deadline of Theseus' wedding day, Hermia decides to elope with Lysander, who rightly observes:

The course of true love never did run smooth.

They meet the next night in the forest outside of Athens, but they're hardly alone. Hermia's friend Helena, who loves and formerly was loved by Demetrius, informs him about their plan just so she can follow when he pursues them. A rag-tag group of craftsmen or "mechanicals" are there too, who have the well-intentioned but wonderfully ridiculous idea of impressing Theseus on his wedding day by putting on a play for him. They're in the forest to rehearse the tragedy Pyramus and Thisbe, about the most inappropriate story conceivable for a wedding day's entertainment. And there to welcome them and the four lovers are the most exotic of the play's characters, the fairies. Their king and queen, Oberon and Titania, are having a supernatural tiff over guardianship of a little human boy, making havoc of the seasons with reckless use of their unearthly powers.

The collision of these three groups—none of them overburdened with wisdom—leads to delightful chaos. Oberon determines to get even with Titania by putting a love potion on the sleeping Hippolyta's eyes that will make her fall in love with the first creature she sees when she wakes. And when he also witnesses Demetrius spurning Helena, he decides to send his mischief-loving sprite Puck to put some on his eyes too so that he'll first see her and requite her passion for him.

But efficient execution is in limited supply out here: Puck mistakenly puts the stuff on Lysander's eyes instead, which makes him fall in love with Helena and correspondingly hate Hermia. Meanwhile, Puck's having fun with the mechanicals, and puts the head of an ass on Bottom, the most simple (but most engaging) of the band. When Titania wakes up and sees Bottom, she falls in love with this monstrosity: Shakespeare's ultimate spoof of love at first sight. What a mess!

Oberon corrects Puck's error by putting the love potion on the eyes of Demetrius so that he will finally love Helena, but now of course he and Lysander both love Helena

(whom neither did before) and fight over her, while Hermia attacks Helena for stealing her boyfriend. Finally all four of the young lovers fall asleep from exhaustion, and Oberon puts an antidote into Lysander's eyes to remove the spell.

Titania has been ludicrously feting Bottom in her bower, but when they both fall asleep Oberon in pity puts the antidote on her eyes, restoring her judgment. Now, as dawn approaches, Theseus and Hippolyta appear in the forest, where they've been hunting (both are the outdoors type). They wake the lovers, each of whom now loves the right partner, and everyone returns to Athens.

On the wedding day for the royalty and four lovers, Bottom and the mechanicals present what is arguably the funniest tragedy in dramatic history, but Theseus commends them anyway for their sincere and humble effort. When the newly-weds retire to bed, Puck invites our applause as the play ends.

“Wings and no eyes”

Young love is blinding—as those of us looking back at it years later painfully remember—and stumbling blindly through it can bring both ecstasy and heartache. Eye imagery, therefore, is the most dominant in the play. Hermia's language reveals that she loves what she sees:

HERMIA

*I would my father look'd but with my
eyes.*

THESEUS

*Rather your eyes must with his judgment
look.*

The girl laments having “to choose love by another's eyes” and believes that seeing a man is the key factor in loving him. When Helena complains of Demetrius' loving Hermia, Hermia replies,

Take comfort. He no more shall see my face.

Soon after, Helena gives one of literature's most astute descriptions of the folly of love by sight:

*How happy some o'er other some can be!
Through Athens I am thought as fair as she.
But what of that? Demetrius thinks not so.
He will not know what all but he do know.
And as he errs, doting on Hermia's eyes,
So I, admiring of his qualities.
Things base and vile, holding no quantity,
Love can transpose to form and dignity.
Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind,
And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind.
Nor hath love's mind of any judgement taste;
Wings and no eyes figure unheedy haste.*

*And therefore is love said to be a child
Because in choice he is so oft beguiled.
As waggish boys in game themselves forswear,
So the boy Love is perjured every where.*

Helena knows that around Athens she's considered just as beautiful as Hermia by everybody except Demetrius, but she laments that this doesn't matter since Demetrius, who's the only person that counts with her, can't see it because he's dazzled by "Hermia's eyes." This is his mistake, Helena says, but she frankly admits she errs in the same way, dazzled by him. Her analysis of this human failing prepares us for later action in the play. Love, she says, can make the ugliest and most worthless things (or people) look marvelous in the eyes of their lovers. The reason:

Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind.

I.e., love sees, not what's really there, but what it wants to be there. This is the reason why Cupid, the symbol of love, is painted blindfolded. On top of that, love is careening out of control all over the world, as symbolized by Cupid's wings. A mischievous, blindfolded boy flying around at high speed is dangerous; worse, being a child, Cupid is often fooled in his choices. Such is a person in love, Helena says.

The comic irony is that Helena, a woman who's intelligently characterized the blind folly of a person in love, is that blind person herself, and she knows it. But she's not the first keen person who's stood, as it were, out-of-body, and watched herself behaving like a fool because she's in love. At the end of her speech she illustrates her own lesson by deciding to go tell Demetrius about Lysander and Hermia's flight just so she can have some time with him, even though he'll be chasing after another woman that she's helping him to find! Dumb, but that's love.

Shakespeare next gives a kind of embodiment to blind love by moving the whole play to the forest. Forests are dim and confusing places even in the daylight; at night in the moonlight everything appears beautiful to the eye, but distorted. Love makes things lovely and distorted to the eye too, and Shakespeare creates a symbol for it in Oberon's love potion, a distillation from Cupid's arrow.

The quintessential example of love at first sight occurs when Oberon puts the potion in the eyes of Titania. She wakes to see and therefore to love a creature with the body of a man and the head of an ass, whose name, appropriately enough, is Bottom. She spends the next few hours foolishly loving a clown. Not, alas, the first queen who's fallen for such a man.

"My mistress with a monster is in love"

There's folly in all of these cases of love based on distorted sight. Titania's the worst, for she's queen of the fairies, wife of Oberon who rules the fairy world, and the universe's most prestigious, exotic, and desirable woman. Now, suddenly, she's in love with a monster. Only when her lord removes the spell from her eyes does she see clearly again.

Nor is love the only arena of life in which people's sight is warped. As a Christian, how many times have I let my own spiritual sight be perverted, and what monsters of materialism, lust, ambition, envy, and false values have I fallen in love with because I didn't see them clearly?

Jesus warned us, didn't He?

The lamp of the body is the eye. Therefore, when your eye is good, your whole body also is full of light. But when your eye is bad, your body also is full of darkness. (Luke 11:34 NKJV)

John wrote this admonishment to his spiritual children:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. (1 John 2:15-16 NKJV)

But like Titania, once we get the world's potion in our eyes we seem to never get tired of looking at the wrong things, no matter how ugly they really are.

*Death and Destruction
are never satisfied,
and neither are the eyes of man.
(Proverbs 27:20 (NIV))*

*The eye never has enough of seeing,
nor the ear its fill of hearing.
(Ecclesiastes 1:8 (NIV))*

How many famous or infamous people; expensive homes, clothes, and toys; seductive men or women; seamy movies; shoddy, tasteless t.v. shows; and multi-zero monetary sums have I coveted for years—but still my “eye never has enough of seeing” and is “never satisfied”?

Eventually, if I close my eyes and ears to God's admonitions, I lose my ability to see clearly at all:

*For the hearts of this people have grown dull.
Their ears are hard of hearing,
And their eyes they have closed,
Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears,
Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,
So that I should heal them.
(Matthew 13:15)*

Further, our vision can not only be distorted, but outright blocked by the obstacle of sin in our lives, as Jesus illustrated in this humorously exaggerated figure:

And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. (Matthew 7:3-5)

Fortunately the eyes of Titania don't remain under this spell that causes her to

yearn body and soul for a monster. There is a remedy. When the four lovers are wandering lost in the woods, with Demetrius and Lysander trying to find and hurt each other, Oberon gives Puck an antidote for the distorted vision of both Lysander and Titania:

*crush this herb into Lysander's eye
Whose liquor hath this virtuous property,
To take from thence all error with his might,
And make his eyeballs roll with wonted sight.
When they next wake, all this derision
Shall seem a dream and fruitless vision,
And back to Athens shall the lovers wend
With league whose date till death shall never
Whiles I in this affair do thee employ,
I'll to my queen and beg her Indian boy;
And then I will her charmèd eye release
From monster's view, and all things shall be
peace.* end.

“With wonted sight”

Want all things to be peace in your life? Christ also offers a remedy for our distorted sight, the sequence of blessings that begin with the gospel and culminate in enlightened spiritual vision, as Paul recounts in Ephesians 1:13-17: hearing the truth, believing in Christ and being sealed in His Spirit, possessing faith, and receiving wisdom, revelation, wisdom, and knowledge. Paul describes the blessing that he yearns for his readers to receive:

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. (Ephesians 1:18-19)

These blessings fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah:

*In that day the deaf shall hear the words of the book,
And the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity and out of darkness.
(Isaiah 29:18)*

Titania is restored to “wonted sight” by the antidote, and afterwards she’s horrified to see the ugliness of what she’d doted on:

O, how mine eyes do loathe his visage now!

Paul also hated the sin that strongly plagued his body:

but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? (Romans 7:23-24)

And Titania’s abhorrence is exceeded by the righteous man’s revulsion to sin:

Do not bring a detestable thing into your house or you, like it, will be set

apart for destruction. Utterly abhor and detest it, for it is set apart for destruction. (Deuteronomy 7:26)

Lot is described as

a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)— (2 Peter 2:7-8)

Theseus, marshal of reason and order in the play, wakes the restored lovers with harmonious music as morning light dispels the darkness of the forest, and everyone returns happily to Athens. On the spiritual level, Jesus said,

“See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness. Therefore, if your whole body is full of light, and no part of it dark, it will be completely lighted, as when the light of a lamp shines on you.” (Luke 11:34-36 NIV)

Harmony restored. Love rightly directed. Vision focused.

Shakespeare Quotations for Ministers, by John Parker

Quotations on justice vs. mercy from *Measure for Measure*

Those many had not dar'd to do that evil
If the first that did th' edict infringe
Had answer'd for his deed.
2.2



I show [pity] most of all when I show justice;
Which a dismiss'd offense would after gall,
And do him right that, answering one foul wrong,
Lives not to act another.
2.2

Why, all the souls that were forfeit once,
And He that might the vantage best have took
Found out the remedy. How would you be,
If He, which is the top of judgment, should
But judge you as you are? O think on that,
And mercy then will breathe within your lips
Like man new made.
2.2.

He who the sword of heaven will bear
Should be as holy as severe;
Pattern in himself to know,
Grace to stand, and virtue go;

Than by self-offenses weighing.
3.2

Observations from the Hendersonville Interim



HENDERSONVILLE CHURCH OF CHRIST

December 31, 2009



Dear Church Leaders:

When we began the usual process of replacing our pulpit minister of 16 years we were asked by a consultant if we had considered using an intentional interim preacher. After some initial research we decided to pursue the idea further. Since the concept was new to all of us, we decided that not only did we need an interim pulpit minister; we also needed the guidance of a consultant who had been trained in minister transition. It soon became apparent that if we could find a person who could fill both of these roles that would be the ideal situation. However, we also realized that would take a very unique person, and that in itself might be as hard to find as our new pulpit minister.

Once we heard about Jerrie Barber and met with him, asking him to work with our congregation turned out to be one of the easiest and best decisions we made. Jerrie's unique training, abilities, and interest proved to be invaluable to our congregation. Jerrie served during the full year of 2009 as our interim pulpit minister and, beginning the last quarter of 2008, as transition consultant to the eldership. Not only did he deliver relevant, Bible-based sermons, he taught classes, visited the hospitals and funeral homes, and labored diligently ministering to the needs of our members. His wife, Gail, has also been a complement to Jerrie's ministry, teaching and assisting with our deaf ministry. They have both been actively involved members of our church family, and we have grown to love and appreciate them.

Without a doubt we know that God not only has led us to our new Pulpit Minister, looking back we know that he also led us to Jerrie Barber. As elders of the Hendersonville Church of Christ, we would recommend any church that is looking to replace a minister that has been with you for a considerable length of time to contact Jerrie and seriously consider using him to bless your congregation as he has ours.

In Christ,

The Elders

Craig Callis

John Kester

Glen Rodgers

Rick Fussell

Don Litchford

Bill Shannon

J. Larry Graham

Larry Perry

Rod Stamps

Dennis Johnson

Ron Pounders

Karl Wagnon

(to see a PDF of the actual letter: [Hendersonville Elders](#))



6 January 2010

Dear Jerrie and Gail,

Stephanie and I would like to thank you once more for what you meant to our congregation here in Hendersonville. I admit, I was not completely sold on the idea of an interim minister at first. I now see the wisdom in such a move. You filled that role in a masterful way, and I now believe that all of us are better for it. You "prepared the soil" and "sowed some very meaningful seeds." Thank you for your wisdom, your guidance, and your wonderful lessons as we moved through this interim period. I am confident that God will continue to use each of you in a meaningful way for many years to come. Our prayers will go with you, and we hope to see you guys again soon. As far as we are concerned, you will always be a part of our family here in Hendersonville.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mike Stephanie".

Mike and Stephanie Ryan

(to see a PDF of the actual letter: [Mike and Stephanie Ryan](#))

Smile of the Month

The Generation Gap Or Things are not always as they seem by Jack McMahan

He was 12 going on Manhood, in his mind. He was 12, fighting to keep his childhood, in my mind.

He had reached the time in his life when he could be the perfect young man and the next moment spent in absent minded behavior. One thing we were working on was, sitting in church and listening. No children books to read or video games to play.



You can image my distress when I looked down to see him with I-Pod in hand, thumbs flying, playing a game.

I gave him that stare that we parents and grandparents all know, the one that you can feel. It only took a few seconds before he felt the stare and turned his eyes to my stare. He in turn gave me that, “What” look back. I moved my hand for him to give me the I-Pod, which he quickly did. After a few seconds, I lowered my eyes to see what game he had been playing and found an outline of Brother Barber’s sermon.

The smile on my face paled to the smile in my heart, as I handed back to him the I-Pod. You know things are not always as they seem. (I express my thanks to Jack McMahan for telling me of this incident, writing it, and giving me permission to share it with you.)

Barber Clippings

We finished our work in Hendersonville December 30. The elders, staff, and congregation were cooperative and encouraging. My last official function was to meet with the Search and Interview Committees Tuesday, December 30. I asked what they learned from the process, what worked well, what they would do differently the next time, and asked for suggestions on how I could be more effective as in interim preacher.

I am now available to work with another congregation. If you know of a church where I might be helpful, I would appreciate the contact.

I am also available for a limited number of special series and workshops. I have a new page on my web site that describes some of these. Please go to [Special Series and Workshops](#) .

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John Parker

Jill and I completed our interim ministry at the Fairview, Tennessee, congregation on December 20. There were three baptisms that day and two more the following Sunday, and we rejoice in the good spirit and optimism that is in this fine congregation. Brad Tate is now their new minister, and we pray for every success for him and his wife Christy.

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