

Group Work

I was one of those students who hated group work. I was pretty good at school, good at writing reports and doing research and all that, and left to myself I got good grades. But for some reason teachers (usually Mrs. McKean) kept breaking us into groups and assigning projects for us to do *together*, and on which, worst of all, *we would all get the same grade!*

Didn't they know what that meant? Didn't they realize that if they assigned me to a group with a slacker – and they *always* did – that slacker might drag *my* grade down? Didn't they realize that my middle school social studies grade would be on my permanent record? What if I didn't get into college because of that group project? It would be their fault for assigning me to a group with Louis.

So I did what uptight, overstressed, delusional grade-hounds have always done: I did all my work, then all Louis's work, then took the project home over the weekend and redid bits and pieces of everyone else's work before bringing it back to school to hand in. And my teachers would look at the final project, give me a suspicious look, and roll their eyes, but I didn't care because, after all, *it was for a GRADE!*

It turns out it really wasn't. It turns out that what those teachers were doing was forcing us to work with other people, in the hope that we would learn from each other, develop good communication skills, and discover that even if people don't all think the same way they can still work together. I generally got good grades on those projects (I think, but who knows? Even I don't care any more). But I also failed to learn what I was supposed to learn.

I've gotten a lot better. I seem to have ended up in a calling where group work is pretty much all that matters. Any project or plan that I (or any other one person) conceive and push for is, by definition, doomed to fail. Everything that actually works in a church – actually changes lives – begins with a church member, filters through the congregation until it attracts enough interest, and then is carried out as a group by the people of the church. There are no exceptions. And these things work. Relationships are forged; people are encouraged; burdens are lifted. There are no grades.

But there is one area I've never let go of: sermons. I plan my sermon series. I do the preparation. I write the sermons. I practice them. I preach them. And when people come to me with sermon suggestions, I usually ignore them and do what I was going to do anyway. After all, I'm the one who has to stand up there and deliver it! I'm the one on the podcast! I can't let other people do parts of it! They might affect MY GRADE!

So March is going to be interesting for me. The Worship Design Team has planned a Lenten sermon series that everyone works on together. I get to start, but then I get to listen. Who knows maybe I'll learn (again) that even if we don't all think alike, we can still work together and learn from each other. Mrs. McKean would be proud of me.