

An Electronic Alternative for Snowy Sundays

Sundays last a long time when snow and ice keep the church doors closed.

So does the week that follows. That regular time of worshiping God among His people – singing praise, offering prayer, and hearing the Word of God applied to our lives – nourishes our souls. Worship prepares us to face the challenges and to welcome the work of the week ahead.

When we miss that spiritual nourishment, our souls are left ... hungry. We aren't as prepared to testify to our faith. We grow weak – more readily falling before Satan's daily onslaught of temptations. We begin the week unrested – spiritually exhausted, with no source of solace in sight.

The recent ice storm forced our family to face that reality – and to ask how we might honor the Lord's Day when the weather makes travel unsafe.

So once the prayer chain was activated and calls had been made to the radio station, I fired up the Internet to start a small experiment. The result of that experiment was a Lord's Day salvaged – prevented from becoming the equivalent of just another snowy Saturday.

In the past, when worship has been canceled, we've gathered as a family for a Bible reading and prayer. Usually we would sing a song or two from the Psalter Hymnal.

But this time, we went a bit farther.

Before gathering the kids, I spent a bit of time surfing SermonAudio.com – a website that hosts a library of free-to-download sermons from conservative churches. Although the sermons come from a wide variety of churches, everyone who hosts sermons at SermonAudio.com must agree to a statement of faith that is soundly Biblical.

I learned about the site from fellow ministers whose consistories post audio files of their sermons at SermonAudio.com, including Rev. Todd De Rooy of Redeemer URC in Orange City and Rev. Dan Donovan of Cornerstone URC in Sanborn. (In fact, there are at least 20 United Reformed Churches that post sermons there.)

After talking with Grace, we decided that the kids would probably do best with a video sermon. That way their eyes would be occupied, minimizing the temptation to daydream.

The majority of the sermons at SermonAudio.com are audio files – meaning you can listen, but there's no picture. However, they also have more than 9,000 video sermons and lectures, so I was fairly sure I could find something suitable.

After a bit of browsing, I settled on a sermon by Rev. Paul Tripp, pastor of 10th Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Philadelphia. I knew of Rev. Tripp through several books he has written, and Grace and I had been blessed by hearing his brother, Tedd Tripp, speaking on Christian parenting.

The sermon was great.

But we didn't start there. We began by gathering the kids in the living room and singing a few songs from the Psalter Hymnal. Then I led them in praying for the members of our church, for the nation, and for those who had to be out in the winter storm. We prayed for the week ahead – that God would strengthen and use us – and asked for God to bless our worship.

Then I explained what we planned to do.

After answering their questions, we clicked on the video and turned up the volume. Then we settled in to hear Rev. Tripp preach on a passage from Mark 10, where Jesus says we must receive the Kingdom of God like children.

Jesse wriggled a bit, as 2-year-olds are apt to do. But everyone else was intent on the screen – and the message being proclaimed there.

Afterward, we talked about the sermon for a few minutes before singing another couple of songs, praying, and dismissing the kids to play games.

This was our first experiment with using "electronic" sermons – and it was a great experience that salvaged our opportunity to receive the nourishment that the Lord's Day ought to provide.

Don't get me wrong; the Internet is no substitute for worshiping in person with God's people! But when weather prevents us from getting to church, or when a parent needs to remain home with a sick child, or even when illness prevents *one of us* from attending – this is an excellent way to avoid missing out entirely on the spiritual nourishment that we so deeply need.

As parents, it's clear to us that the electronic age has ushered in a whole new host of threats and temptation. But it also has provided God's people with new tools for serving and learning about the Lord.

Let me urge you to give SermonAudio.com a try the next time you're unable to attend worship. And may the Father bless our longing to sanctify His holy day as we seek Him through the Word of His Spirit and the grace of His Son!