

Grandpa's Bible (2007)

Houston Hodges, for Writer's Corner on WLRH, Huntsville, AL USA

My grandfather was a Presbyterian preacher in little towns in Missouri; he died when I was four, so I have few memories of him... but I do have his Bible.

He used the Bible as part of his filing system, long before computers. It had all sorts of things stuck between its pages: sermon notes, some family information about people whose funerals he conducted, a few newspaper clippings, a couple of letters. It also contained a silk bookmark, dated 1898 — about when he bought the bible, I think — with a New Year's poem:

1898

Speak a shade more kindly
Than the year before;
Pray a little oftener;
Love a little more;
Cling a little closer
To the Father's love;
Life below shall liker grow
To the life above.

One set of sermon notes has eleven points! The most interesting is the final one, which was obviously an illustration with which he was going to drive home his message and wind up with a winner. The notes say:

Husband away from home
Rooster and kookew eggs.

And cuckoo is spelled "kookew," evidently a word he wasn't familiar with, because he was a pretty good speller, with his elaborate, fancy nineteenth-century script. I wish I knew the story; I'd like to use it some time!

Another finding was the top of a printed letterhead, of which he was very proud. It says:

Audrain County Sunday School Association
Young People's Superintendent
Virginia Pearson

Virginia Pearson was my zany Aunt Gina. Her dad kept the record of what must have been one of the first significant offices she held, kept it in his bible.

There's a letter postmarked July 13, 1934, from the treasurer of his previous church! It says, "Brother Pearson you know I haven't got all of the pledges from the time you started for I wasn't deacon. But I am sending you just what my book showed."

There follows a report on the pledges and the amounts given — no names, just the numbers — what people pledged and what they gave. The largest pledge is \$15.00, largest amount given is \$17.00. Evidently the treasurer was trying to play catch-up and collect a little more money for the preacher; I'm pretty pessimistic about his chances.

There's another letter, postmarked April 12, 1934, just a few months before my grandfather died. Mrs. Theresa Mollner writes, "I thought would drop you a line in regard to work should you need help later I would appreciate your considering me again. Mother is home now and I think she can manage her work and I would love to get work at a nice place where folk are really worth while and try to live right."

"A nice place where folk are really worth while and try to live right." That's not a bad assessment, even though it may not be totally objective.

I wonder what the assessment of you and me would be, seventy years after our death, if all the evidence was what was stuck between the pages of our favorite book.