

Devil in the Pulpit
By Pete Dillingham

It was a small church with a simple steeple, but the path leading to the front door indicated years of heavy traffic. On Sunday mornings the modest structure came alive as its congregation jumped, whooped, and hollered in response to the thunderous voice of “Pastor Jack”. This country preacher was a gifted and undisputed champion of “hell-fire and brimstone”. Sunday sermons were a wake up call to anyone within earshot of the little prairie community. On this worship day, it was going to be a different.

The first indication of a “fly getting in the ointment” occurred when the old preacher got tongue-tied. An upcoming marriage invitation came out “The Wilsons proudly announce ‘bedding wells’ for their daughter Laura!”. The pews went silent, with the exception of a bunch of “gasps” and a few “giggles”. The reverend quickly fumbled for an apology, by trying to say “The devil must have hit my funny bone”....unfortunately it came out “The devil must have hit my bunny phone”! There were fewer gasps, and more giggles. From there, things went down hill; “a crushing blow” was transformed to “a blushing crow”, “sons of toil” came out “tons of soil”, “our loving shepherd” was loudly proclaimed “our shoving leopard” and “a pack of lies” turned into “a lack of pies”. In Pastor Jack’s last pleading moments “ease my tears” became “tease my ears” and “so help me God” ended up “go help me sod”. The parish laughter still echoes through the land whenever it remembers the day the devil sat in the pulpit.

Bad communication can go a long way... whether you are in the pulpit or in the saddle. When the devil sits in the saddle, a rider is usually hunched over, their legs clamped on the horse’s sides, a “death grip” on the saddle horn, and the rider’s voice is anything but calm. This can result in a horse that is as confused and frightened as the person on its back.

There are a bunch of things the novice rider can do to kick Lucifer out of the saddle:

1. Heels should be pointed down to the ground because; a) this allows a rider to use their knees and ankles like shock absorbers. That keeps a passenger centered on the horse’s back. b) When a rider’s heels are down, the legs are not accidentally touching a horse’s sides and giving a confusing signal.
2. Don’t grab the saddle with your hands because: a) if a rider’s hands are busy with the saddle horn, the devil is controlling the reins! b) When a person uses their hands to keep balanced, their legs (shock absorbers) will forget to do the job.
3. Sit up straight because a) When a rider has poor posture, their body will tend to be flung to outer space if the horse does a “whoop-to-do”. b) Good posture improves communication and helps the horse carry a rider’s weight better.
4. Talk in calm tones. A few steeds will think screams, whoops, and yells mean that something “horse-eating” is around the corner or on their back.
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Pastor Jack finally got brave enough to step back into the pulpit. At first his speech was slow and words were well picked..... the congregation listened to every syllable. In time the old reverend was back to preaching “brimstone”, but he never let his sermons get out of control like a runaway horse.