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CONCORDIA SEMINARY
SAINT LOUIS, MISSOURI

HUMOR IN PREACHING: ITS EFFECTS AND GUIDELINES FOR ITS
BENEFICIAL USE

A MAJOR APPLIED PROJECT SUBMITTED TO
THE DEPARTMENT OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY STUDIES
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
ANTONIN TROUP

SAINT LOUIS, MISSOURI
SEPTEMBER 17, 2009

HUMOR IN PREACHING: ITS EFFECTS AND GUIDELINES FOR ITS
BENEFICIAL USE

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SEPTEMBER 17, 2009

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To Cindy, Tim, Kristen, Christina and Elizabeth, who love me even when I take myself too seriously. God has blessed my socks off!

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ABSTRACT

This project examined the effects that humor in sermons has on hearers, particularly how humor affects their understanding and retention of Biblical truths. After exploring humor's effects on listeners and which types of humor are more beneficial in the task of preaching through theoretical research, the data was investigated through the use of questionnaires, personal interviews with church members, and a focus group. After analyzing the participants' responses, the researcher developed a list of guidelines for the beneficial use of humor in his preaching. These guidelines offer suggestions that other preachers may find helpful in using humor in their sermons.

CHAPTER ONE

THE INTRODUCTION OF THE PROJECT

Problem Addressed by the Project

I had not thought much about humor in preaching and the Christian life until the non-denominational Charismatic fellowship my best friend attended began to practice “holy laughter.” My friend had been happily attending this church for a number of years and appeared to be well assimilated into the congregation. He played trumpet in the praise band. He was a volunteer in the church nursery. He enjoyed the preaching and thought highly of his pastor. Yet after his pastor began to encourage and actually create the phenomenon of holy laughter, my friend had had enough. His pastor would begin their services by telling a few jokes. Once he had tickled everyone’s funny bone, he would start to laugh himself –laughing with a very loud, very distinctive belly laugh. Since laughter is contagious, he soon had the whole congregation laughing hysterically. The people were literally rolling in the aisles! This laughter, the pastor claimed, was a manifestation of the Holy Spirit, a very special gift of God given only to mature Christians who were not afraid to tap into the wonderful power of God. To participate in holy laughter was to experience the mighty working of God. *And God was at work.* After my friend witnessed holy laughter a few times, God moved him to join a different church.

After hearing about my friend's experiences with holy laughter and reading a few articles about it in Christian magazines, I became interested in the use of humor in worship, particularly in preaching. While holy laughter as experienced by my friend is clearly a psychological phenomenon and a tool that some preachers might use to manipulate people, laughter is not ungodly in and of itself. It is often the outward expression of a joyful heart. It lightens the burdened soul. It can be wonderful medicine for whatever ails you. Why not use humor (in moderation) in sermons? Why not use humor to achieve godly goals?

I have always believed that humorous preachers bring something extra to their ministries. Thom Rainer confirmed this belief in his book, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them*. He found that humorous preachers were highly effective in reaching the formerly unchurched (they scored high points with long time church members as well). After interviewing a large number of formerly unchurched Christians, Rainer discovered that these Christians viewed their pastors' sense of humor as a sign of the pastors' authenticity. It conveyed the sense that these pastors were "real" people.¹ Furthermore, effective pastors rated their sense of humor as their *second greatest strength*.² Rainer's findings seem to indicate that humor has the power to draw people to preachers. Used responsibly in the parish setting, could it also have other benefits? Could it help congregational members listen to sermons more attentively and aid them in understanding the content of the sermons?

¹ Thom Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 60-62.

² *Ibid.*, 190.

The typical members of a Christian congregation are bombarded with all sorts of sights and sounds that vie for their attention every day. Contemporary communication techniques incorporate vivid pictures flashed on a screen for less than a second and incessant sound bytes that fill the air. All this gives audiences precious little time to reflect on what is being presented. In the words of David Henderson, “we live in a world short on words. We are flooded with pictures, but have lost the script that goes with them. There is no narration, no meaningful thread that connects them, only one image after another.”³ It is an enormous challenge for preachers to grab and keep the attention of their hearers in our sensory overloaded culture.

The entertainment industry and advertisement agencies have used humor as a device for capturing an audience’s attention for many years. The constant use of this device in the aforementioned fields conveys the perception that it works well. Indeed, tastes in humor have changed tremendously in the entertainment industry and advertisement during the past 50 years, but *the use of humor* has remained constant. Why? Because it works. After researching the effectiveness of humor in advertising, authors Max Sutherland and Alice Sylvester write:

In tracking we have seen situations where humorous TV ads worked very effectively for over a year without showing signs of wear-out. In one case, for example, the ad was on the air for two years before showing any signs of wearing out. The advertiser and the ad agency would have pulled the ad off the air 18 months earlier but for the clear evidence coming from the tracking data.⁴

³ David Henderson, *Culture Shift: Communicating God’s Truth to Our Changing World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 73.

⁴ Max Sutherland and Alice Sylvester, *Advertising and the Mind of the Consumer: What Works, What Doesn’t, and Why* (St. Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 2000), 177.

After discussing how funny ads generate conversation among viewers, Sutherland and Sylvester conclude:

This exposes the fact that humor not only helps an ad break through and get attention but it may also succeed in making the ad itself a point of discussion and attention of the social group... It takes on significance and a level of enjoyment that comes about by the ad emerging from the TV set to become the focus of a conversational interaction ('Oh, look...here comes that great ad again! Doesn't that just break you up? I love that ad').⁵

Increasingly, the church is recognizing and evaluating the use of humor in preaching. In a recent *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* article called "Humor in Our Lives: Laughs from the Pulpit," writer Jeff Daniel interviewed Concordia Seminary's noted homiletics professor, Dr. David Schmitt. According to Dr. Schmitt, humor in preaching is a frequent topic in class discussion and he does offer students some guidelines for its use. Daniel writes:

In his years of teaching homiletics, Schmitt says, he's never conducted a course in which the subject of humor hasn't naturally entered class discussion. When it does, he lays out some general guidelines for students to remember. For humor to be effective in a sermon, Schmitt suggests it be:

- Natural to who you are
- Reverential to what you are discussing
- In service to the message being delivered.⁶

In light of this and because preachers of God's Word want to be heard and want their listeners to understand and retain Biblical truths, the effectiveness of using humor to make sermon points should be examined. Research on this phenomenon, however, is limited. While many preachers have been known to use humor frequently and some preachers have been known to use it effectively, very little has been done in the study of homiletics to determine humor's effect on the listener. Generally, people respond

⁵ Ibid., 177.

⁶ Jeff Daniel, "Humor in our Lives: Laughs from the Pulpit," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, January 21, 2007, EV1.

positively to humor in sermons, but few researchers have undertaken a serious study of humor's effect on the understanding and retention of Biblical truths. Nor have many researchers sought to identify which types of humor are more appropriate and communicate more effectively in sermons. Therefore, the purpose of this project is to gather information regarding the effective use of humor in sermons through theoretical research and test this information through qualitative research. I believe the qualitative research will also help me better understand which types of humor are most effective and appropriate in the context of my parish. This project will certainly not be the definitive work on humor in preaching, but for anyone concerned about communicating Biblical truths to a postmodern world through preaching, the results of this project should be of interest.

The Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project is to develop guidelines that will enhance the usefulness of humor in my own preaching and potentially the preaching of other preachers in other settings. Achieving this goal will involve investigating literature on the subject of using humor in preaching, teaching and communication and testing the relevant insights and propositions obtained from this investigation through qualitative research. The main scope of this project will focus on which types of humor engage hearers and help them understand and retain sermon points. After a careful analysis of the findings of my research, I intend to provide guidelines for preachers, particularly Lutheran preachers, that will help them intentionally use and integrate humor in the task of preaching.

I have served my congregation, Immanuel Lutheran Church, Waterloo, IL, as the sole or administrative pastor for 13 years. During my time with the members of Immanuel, a gradual change in my preaching style and content has occurred which has benefited both my members and me. One of the most marked changes has been an increase in my use of humor. The use of humor and humorous anecdotes has become a frequent element in my preaching. However, I have always worked to ensure that these humorous elements relate to the points of the sermon. “One liners” and other “imported jokes” (jokes that do not relate to the subject or topic and are told to entertain) have not been a part of my preaching. In short, I like humor in preaching, but I have been conscious of avoiding gimmicks and sensationalism so that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is articulated clearly and faithfully.

The aim of my preaching is to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ and teach the whole counsel of God faithfully and clearly, employing beneficially the tools of rhetoric and other communication skills. The use of humor seems to aid in the achievement of this aim. From what I have observed in my parish and from the comments that Immanuel members have offered during the past 13 years, humor does seem to capture the hearers’ attention and cause them to listen more carefully. I expect that the findings of this project’s research will affirm the benefit of humor in the preaching task and provide indications for how to best use it in sermons.

The findings of this project will certainly benefit my own preaching. A better grasp of the effects of humor in preaching and guidance for its best use will help me develop my naturally humorous inclinations in a very intentional way. A better understanding of humor in preaching and its impact on the minds of hearers may also lead others to be

more intentional in discovering their personal humorous inclinations and move them to let those inclinations “shine through from the pulpit.”⁷

The Process of the Project

This research project began when I presented my approved Major Applied Project to the Church Council of Immanuel Lutheran, Waterloo, IL, which is the congregation I have served for 13 years. After elucidating the purpose of the project to the Council members, I briefly explained how I wished congregational members to be involved in it. This involvement included at least 48 church attenders filling out questionnaires that asked about their impressions and recall of the humorous elements of a sermon delivered during one of our worship services. Four sets of questionnaires testing four different sermons were to be used, each set being filled out by twelve church attenders. No one was to fill out more than one questionnaire. Congregational involvement would also include personal interviews with at least 30 of the attenders who filled out a questionnaire. I then asked the Church Council for its permission to proceed with the project. The Council agreed that I should undertake this project and pledged its support.

After receiving the Council’s approval for the project in March of 2008, I presented information about the project to the congregation via church bulletins, monthly newsletters, and verbal announcements during worship services. Along with a request for 48 volunteers, I included a volunteer form which listed the dates on which the questionnaires would be filled out. Volunteers were asked to indicate which date they preferred for filling out a questionnaire. The form also asked for 30 volunteers from

⁷ Graham Johnson, *Preaching to a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), 169.

among those filling out questionnaires to participate in interviews during which they would be asked to share their views and feelings about humor in preaching. I further recruited a small number of volunteers to ensure that a broad spectrum of Immanuel members would be included in the process.

Twelve participants filled out questionnaires after the worship services that were held at Immanuel on July 12-13, 2008, thirteen participants filled out questionnaires after the services on August 16-17, 2008, fifteen participants filled out questionnaires after the services on September 13-14, 2008, and twelve participants filled out questionnaires after the services on October 18-19, 2008.

After these questionnaires were evaluated, I used the information provided by them to assess what kind of humor made the greatest impression on the participants in regard to understanding sermon points and what types of humor appealed to them most. I then designed interview questions to confirm and clarify my assessments. I utilized these questions in 30 interviews conducted during the months of November 2008, December 2008, and January 2009.

After analyzing the findings of the interviews, I incorporated this new information into the body of data I had collected from my theoretical research and used this data to create a list of guidelines for the effective use of humor in sermons delivered to the members of Immanuel Lutheran Church. The final stage of my research involved presenting the findings of my research and guidelines to a focus group for feedback and further refinement. This focus group consisted of the pastors in my circuit: Rev. Jonathan Winterfeldt, Mount Calvary, Cahokia, IL; Rev. Steven Theiss, St. Paul, Columbia; Rev. Ryan Fouts, Holy Cross, Sugar Loaf, IL; Rev. Bruce Keseman, Christ Our Savior,

Freeburg, IL; Rev. Michael Kumm, Trinity, Millstadt, IL; Rev. Stuart Rethwisch, Holy Cross, Wartburg, IL; Rev. Matthew Clark (associate pastor), Immanuel, Waterloo, IL.

The reflective and thorough evaluation of this focus group provided additional data and direction for the effective use of humor in sermons and the satisfactory completion of this project.

Summary

The challenge for preachers to engage hearers with their sermons in our sensory overloaded culture is an immense one. Sadly, it is unlikely that our culture will become more attuned to the reception of oral communication in the years to come. For this reason, preachers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ must be ready to incorporate useful and God pleasing communication techniques to convey their message. Since the use of humor as a rhetorical device seems to be a viable method of engaging hearers and enhancing their retention and understanding of sermon points, this project seeks to clarify how humor in sermons affects hearers. It also seeks to determine which types of humor are more beneficial for the conveyance of the preacher's message. The theoretical research for this project will provide guidance for the achievement of these goals and the field research will affirm or call into question the validity of the data provided by the theoretical research. Part of this research will include input on the subject from the members of Immanuel Lutheran Church, Waterloo, IL, and part of it will include the candid and constructive criticisms of a focus group composed of the pastors of my circuit.

Before this research is conducted, however, this project needs to be examined in the light of Scripture and the theological foundations upon which the church of Jesus Christ is built. In other words, it should be determined whether this project's premise and development are in accord with Scripture and conform to the sound teachings and practices entrusted to Christ's church by the Holy Spirit. This will be the topic of the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

THE BIBLICAL PRECEDENT AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

Introduction

Any topic that centers on the work of preaching must always begin with the Word of God. God's Word, particularly God's message of Law and Gospel, is what we preach. Indeed, preaching has no heart or content apart from Holy Scripture. Moreover, God's Word provides a picture of what the church looks like and how it is to fulfill its mission of making disciples. Thus, as I consider the topic of this Major Applied Project, the questions must be asked, "If humor is to be used in preaching, how has humor and its use played out in the church?" "How is humor reflected in Scripture and what is its proper relationship with Christian preaching and teaching?" "Can something as apparently trite as humor have any connection with God's living and abiding Word?" The purpose of this chapter, then, is to answer those questions by examining the subject of humor and laughter in the Bible and the relationship between the rhetorical device of humor and the Gospel. Though certainly not definitive or exhaustive, the purpose of this chapter is to present pertinent insights concerning the presence of humor and laughter in Scripture and to provide a proper perspective for the use of humor in the church.

The Biblical Precedent

Before beginning a serious study of humor in preaching, we need to ask ourselves how laughter and humor are viewed and presented in Scripture. Is there such a thing as *holy laughter*, that is to say, a sanctified use of humor and laughter? Is there a Biblical precedent for the use of humor in teaching spiritual truths? An absence of humor in the testimony of Scripture may be indicative of a difficulty in using humor appropriately or its lack of relevance to the life of faith. Furthermore, if humor is appropriate and relevant to the Christian, how is this quality manifested in a life guided and guarded by the Holy Spirit? It seems unlikely that Scripture would be completely silent on this matter. Accordingly, special attention should be given to the prominence of humor (or lack of it) in Scripture.

When laughter is mentioned in Scripture, it is often used in connection with cynicism and derision. Thus, both Abraham and Sarah laughed when the Lord told them that they would have a child in their old age (Gen. 17:7 and Gen. 18:12). This was cynical laughter, the chuckle of unbelief. The people of Israel ridiculed the messengers of King Hezekiah when they read letters from the king urging the people to repent and return to the Lord (2 Chron. 30:10). Again, this was mockery born of unbelief. The people were splitting a gut all the way to hell. The mourners at the funeral of Jairus' daughter laughed at Jesus ("laughed to scorn" in the KJV) when he told them that the dead girl was only sleeping (Luke 8:53; Mark 5:40).

This laughing in derision is also used of God. In Psalm 37:12-13 David declares, "The wicked plot against the righteous and gnash their teeth at them; but the Lord laughs at the wicked, for he knows their day is coming" (another way of saying that every dog

has his day). And in Psalm 59:8 God laughs at the haughtiness of the nations. The psalmist declares, “But you, O Lord, laugh at them; you scoff at all those nations.”

Yet we also see laughter in the Bible used in connection with joyful events and the absence of mourning and pain. There is “a time to laugh” according to Eccl. 3:4. In Gen. 21:6 Sarah states that God brought her laughter with the birth of Isaac and that “everyone who hears about this (i.e., a son born to her in her old age) will laugh with me.” God turned Sarah’s cynical laughter of unbelief into joyful laughter through the miraculous birth of Isaac. In Psalm 126:2 we’re told that when the Lord returned the captives in Babylon to Jerusalem, their “mouths were filled with laughter.” All of Psalm 126 is a song of joy for the restoration of Zion! And in Luke 6:21 Jesus assures us that those “who weep now will laugh,” underscoring the joy of our salvation and our release from an earthly existence which is now a “veil of tears.” Laughter, it seems, is the Christian’s response to the joy that God grants him through our Savior Jesus.

It is also rather clear that there are plays on words in Scripture. Take the name *Onesimus*, for example. In Philemon 11 Paul writes of Onesimus, “Formerly he was *useless* to you (Onesimus means “useful”), but now he has become *useful* both to you and to me.” To be sure, Paul is no Jay Leno, but he does appear playful. Perhaps Paul was using a little humor to soften Philemon up. Remember that Onesimus was Philemon’s runaway slave and Paul was sending him back to Philemon. The whole epistle of Philemon is an appeal to Philemon to receive Onesimus back graciously and not treat him harshly. Putting a smile on Philemon’s face would definitely go a long way in achieving Paul’s purpose.

One may also argue that there is a certain amount of playfulness and humor in many of Jesus' sayings. It is very possible that Jesus had a smile on his face when he told the parable of the unrighteous judge. Just think about the premise of this parable. Jesus is basically saying, "This sly, wily judge gave a widow the decision she wanted because she kept buggin' him. She wouldn't get off his back! Finally, he gave in to her to get rid of her. Know that your Father in heaven will treat you far more favorably than the judge treated the widow –and you won't have to pester him!" I know I would not be able to tell this parable without a smile on my face! Possibly this was the case, too, when Jesus asked the rhetorical question, "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?" (Luke 11:12) One only needs to imagine the modern equivalent of this saying –scorpions popping out of an egg carton- to see the humor in it.

In emphasizing the benefits of humor in sermons, author Bruce Mawhinney suggests that Jesus made a strong point in "memorable fashion" when he used hyperbole against his enemies. In describing the extreme legalism, lack of mercy and hypocrisy of the Pharisees, Jesus said, "You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel" (Matthew 23:24, NIV).⁸ Perhaps the gravity of the Pharisees' sin prevents us from seeing any humor in Jesus' saying here. Left on its own, however, the image of a man swallowing a camel after straining out a gnat does seem a bit comical.

⁸ Bruce Mawhinney, *Preaching With Freshness* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1997), 254-255.

We often think of Jesus as being entirely serious when he gave Simon the nickname *Peter*, meaning “Rock.” Yet it is often the case that nicknames have a playful quality to them. If we translate *Petros* as “Little Rock,” Jesus words to Peter in Matthew 16:18 take on a playful little twist. Jesus said, “Simon, you are a little rock, a pebble really –and on this big rock, this boulder of faith, I will build my church.” Additionally, is it not possible that James and John were nicknamed *Sons of Thunder* because they were bold and because *they had big mouths*?

Certainly the examples of humor I have cited seem very dry by American standards, *but they do have a certain lighthearted quality about them*. It would not be hard to imagine the writers or speakers previously mentioned delivering their messages with a little smile on their faces, nor would it be far-fetched to imagine a slight grin on the faces of their audiences as they received those messages.

Christian Liberty

Even if one were to argue that the Scripture’s use of humor cannot be definitely or convincingly demonstrated, there certainly is no prohibition in Scripture against the use of humor in teaching spiritual truth. To put it another way, the Bible does not prescribe the use of humor, but neither does it forbid it. The humorous elements we see in the Bible, I suggest, are descriptive. The Bible presents and describes God intervening in human affairs --affairs that are fraught with sadness, failures, successes, joy, and yes, humor and laughter.

Noting the preacher’s need to incorporate the common experiences of life in his sermons, Thomas Long writes:

Christian witness naturally gathers in experiences and examples from the common round of human existence. Indeed, any sermon that remained entirely in the realm of abstract thought, never touching the real world of fields and crops, parents and children, employers and workers, feasts and banquets, toil and play, would hardly qualify as Christian preaching at all.⁹

Humor is an undeniable part of our human existence. It follows, then, that humor will appear in sermons as they reflect real life experiences and emotions. This humor in real life experiences is clearly evident in Acts 12 where Luke reports Peter's escape from Herod's prison. After being freed from his chains and cell by an angel, Peter went to the house of Mark's mother to tell fellow believers the good news of his escape. When Peter knocked at the outer entrance, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer the door. When she heard Peter's voice, she was overjoyed and ran to tell the others that Peter was free –and forgot to open the door! Peter had to keep on knocking until the others came and opened the door for him. Acts 12 is humorous because it reflects a humorous incident that actually happened (one could also argue that Luke relates the story in a humorous way).

There can be little doubt that using humor in Christian preaching and teaching falls within the realm of Christian liberty. After noting some examples of humor in the Bible in his book *Preaching and Teaching with Imagination*, Warren Wiersbe asks, "If the Holy Spirit saw fit to write humor in the Bible, does this give us the freedom to use it in our preaching?" He concludes, "The whole person must be in the pulpit, sanctified and empowered by the Spirit of God. If the preacher has a sense of humor, then it must be

⁹ Thomas Long, *The Witness of Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1989), 156.

given to God.”¹⁰ If we truly mean what we sing in the hymn *Take My Life and Let It Be*, then we must agree with Wiersbe, for the hymn writer declares:

*Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold;
Take my intellect and use every pow’r as Thou shalt choose.*¹¹

Humor is a power that should be given to God to use as he chooses.

Christian Joy

While the Bible is silent when it comes to the use of humor in preaching and teaching, Scripture is full of references concerning Christian joy. Paul uses the word *joy* in its various forms no less than 16 times in his epistle to the Philippians (an epistle which is only 4 chapters long). Joy is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22), and we’re told by Jesus that he came and gave us the Gospel so that his joy would be in us and that our “joy would be complete” (John 15:11). The hymnody of the church reflects this joy. The word *rejoice* is the first word of at least four hymns in *Lutheran Service Book* according to that hymnal’s index of the first lines of hymns. While I am not suggesting that all Christians are or should be bubbly and walk around with permanent grins plastered on their faces, the Christian life is one marked by joy. Joy is the natural response of the sinner whose sins are forgiven for the sake of Jesus Christ. It is the natural response of one who, after being crushed by the law and the weight of his sins, is healed and lifted up

¹⁰ Warren Wiersbe, *Preaching and Teaching with Imagination* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1994), 275.

¹¹ *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), hymn #275.

by Jesus. It is the response of one who knows the power of Jesus' resurrection and celebrates his victory of sin, death and the devil.

Given this, will not a humorous preacher better convey a sense of Christian joy than a somber one? Granted, joy often exists without laughter and sometimes without even a smile. Christian joy may exist in a person with a sullen disposition. However, it seems almost self-evident that a humorous person will better reflect Christian joy than a sullen one. Since form and content go together, it follows that a smiling preacher will better communicate the joy of the Jesus' accomplished work and resurrection when proclaiming the Gospel. Indeed, if a preacher frowns as he preaches the resurrection of Jesus, it may cause some of his hearers to wonder whether he believes in the resurrection at all!

There are few studies or statistics to confirm this proposition, but a good number of authors have written about the contagious joy of humorous speakers. In *The Laughing Classroom*, authors Diana Loomans and Karen Kohlberg list joy as one of the five positive results of humor and laughing.¹² They also describe joke makers who take humor and play "to their highest form" as "joy makers."¹³ Clearly, a smiling, jovial preacher who sees humor in life reflects Christian joy far more effectively than an unsmiling preacher who takes himself too seriously.

This quality of joy in a humorous, lighthearted preacher was also apparent to Martin Luther. As he discussed the task of preaching with the students who often gathered around the table at his home, Luther stressed the need for a good sense of humor.

¹² Diana Loomans and Karen Kohlberg, *The Laughing Classroom* (Tiburon: H J Kramer, 1993), 20.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 16.

Quoting Luther's student W. A. Tirschreden, Robert Kolb states that Luther rated a good sense of humor as *one of the ten most important qualities in a preacher*.¹⁴

Even C. F. W. Walther, a theologian often thought of as a rather stoic individual (perhaps his unsmiling photographs have given this impression), stressed the need to deliver God's Word with a cheerful demeanor. During the first evening of his Law and Gospel lectures, Walther stated, "I do not want you to stand in your pulpits like lifeless statues, but to speak with confidence and with *cheerful* (my emphasis) courage offer help where help is needed."¹⁵

There is tendency and a danger for preachers to take themselves too seriously. Dr. Dale Meyer, the professor who taught my first homiletics class, warned against preachers thinking that the success of God's work depends on them. He encouraged us to study the sermon text thoroughly, write the sermon thoughtfully and prepare for the delivery by memorizing our sermon manuscript. Once that was done, we were told to relax and enjoy the experience of preaching. "Don't take yourselves too seriously," Dr. Meyer would tell us. "You've done your work, let the Holy Spirit do his." Experience has taught most preachers the truth of those sage words.

Preachers and pastors who take themselves too seriously become easily frustrated by the pressures of ministry. They often forget that the church they serve is God's church and the work of ministry does not depend wholly on them. *Christian joy seems absent from their lives.*

¹⁴ Robert Kolb, "Martin Luther, Preacher," *Concordia Pulpit Resources*, Vol 4, Part 4, 12.

¹⁵ W. F. W. Walther, trans. W. H. T. Dau, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1897), 5.

I am not suggesting that serious pastors are not good pastors. Preaching God's Word and administering the sacraments are serious business. Pastors repeatedly witness the pain and sadness that people endure because we live in a fallen, sinful world. The yoke of office can weigh very heavily on a man. But a pastor who smiles, greets people warmly and sees humor in life can better communicate the blessed truth that God does indeed "work all things together for the good of those who love him" (Rom. 8:28, NIV). That pastor helps us envision the fulfillment of the Lord's promise, "I will turn your mourning into gladness; I will give you comfort and joy instead of sadness" (Jer. 31:13, NIV).

The Relationship between the Rhetorical Device of Humor and the Gospel

The Lutheran Confessions make it clear that the work of conversion, regeneration, and sanctification is accomplished by the Holy Spirit operating through the means of grace. The Gospel of Jesus Christ, communicated and delivered through God's Word and the sacraments of Holy Communion and Holy Baptism, is that which the Holy Spirit uses to bring unbelievers to faith in Christ and strengthen the faith of believers. In his book, *A Summary of Christian Doctrine*, Edward Koehler explains that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are historic facts, but the meaning of these events cannot be known to us unless it is revealed to us by God. "If sinners are to profit by the merits of Christ's redemption," Koehler writes, "these merits must be offered and imparted to

them. Hence, the necessity of means, by which the merits of Christ are revealed, offered and imparted to us.”¹⁶

Salvation and our new life as Christians are not the result of human decision or will. Article XVIII of the Augsburg Confession and Article II of the Formula of Concord make it clear that we are totally dependent on the Holy Spirit working through God’s means of grace to produce and sustain faith in us. Article XVIII of the Augsburg Confession states:

It is taught among us that man possesses some measure of freedom of will which enables him to live an outwardly honorable life and to make choices among the things that reason comprehends. But without the grace, help, and activity of the Holy Spirit man is not capable of making himself acceptable to God, of fearing God and believing in God with his whole heart, or expelling inborn evil lusts from the heart. This is accomplished by the Holy Spirit, who is given through the Word of God, for St. Paul says in 1 Cor. 2:14, “Natural man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God.”¹⁷

Consequently, Christians, particularly pastors, must take special care to make sure God’s means of grace are utilized.

Since the use of humor in preaching is a rhetorical device and not the Gospel itself, preachers must be cognizant of the difference between humor (and other rhetorical devices) and God’s means of grace. There are no substitutes for the Gospel message delivered in a clear, straightforward way. The belief that conversion and the strengthening of faith in Christ depend on the rhetorical skills and intellect of the preacher is not only false and misleading, but also devastatingly frustrating to the preacher. Speaking through the prophet Zechariah in Zech. 4:6, the Lord lets us know

¹⁶ Edward Koehler, *A Summary of Christian Doctrine* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1939), 189.

¹⁷ Augsburg Confession, Article XVIII, 1-3, Theodore Tappert, editor and translator, *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 39.

that his purposes are achieved “not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit” (NIV). The preacher who forgets those enlightening words will very soon find himself tearing out his hair in frustration. Without dependence on the Holy Spirit working through God’s Word and sacraments, the preacher will achieve precious little in the way of true spiritual conversion and growth despite all his efforts.

In Rom. 10:17 St. Paul makes it clear that the Gospel message and not rhetorical devices is that which creates and strengthens saving faith in Christ. He writes, “Faith comes by hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (NIV). Article V of the Augsburg Confession reiterates this when it states that faith is obtained through preaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments. Through these, God “gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where he pleases, in those who hear the Gospel.”¹⁸ The Word of God proclaimed by the preacher has an inherent efficacy to bring people to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. No “tricks” are needed. Therefore, along with St. Paul, preachers must determine in their hearts to “preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:23-24, NIV).

This does not mean, however, that seeking to convey meaning through rhetorical devices and effective communication is undesirable. Indeed, it is highly desirable, even necessary. As was mentioned previously, there are no Scriptural injunctions forbidding the use of humor and other methods of communication in the task of preaching and

¹⁸ Augsburg Confession, Article V, 2, in Tappert, 31.

teaching. In truth, we see numerous examples of rhetorical devices being used by preachers in the Bible. For instance, the Apostle Paul used rhetorical questions (“Shall we go on sinning that grace may abound? No way!” Rom. 6:1-2, my own translation) throughout his epistles. He also made use of wonderful analogies and metaphors—the church as a human body (1 Cor. 12), Paul planting the seed of God’s Word and Apollos watering it (1 Cor. 3:6), husbands loving their wives as Christ loved the church (Eph. 5:25-29). Moreover, Jesus himself made use of stories, metaphors, parables, and vivid images. While God’s truth is certainly delivered through plain, unadorned propositional statements, it can also be conveyed with the help of other communication techniques.

The use of communication techniques becomes especially relevant when preachers and other Christians desire to reach the hearts and minds of listeners who are accustomed to channel surfing whenever they lose interest in what they are seeing and hearing. While it is certain that “faith comes by hearing,” it is equally certain that the hearing involved in creating faith is *perceptive* hearing, that is, listening attentively with the intent of understanding.

To be sure, God’s Word is powerful to achieve his purposes. As the Lord declares in Isaiah: “As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it” (Is. 55:10-11, NIV). God’s Word is powerful even when his message is poorly articulated. But God’s message proclaimed with deep conviction, passion and in a way that is engaging and relevant to the lives of hearers has the potential for opening ears to the

message that the Holy Spirit will work through. In other words, humor and rhetorical devices may be used by the preacher in order to increase the willingness of his hearers to listen to the message, so that through such listening the Holy Spirit might work.

Of course, this kind of thinking creates a tension that will be readily apparent to most preachers. This tension was explored by Robert Kolb in an address to students at a continuing education seminar at Concordia Seminary in 1997. During this address, Kolb reflected on being faithful to the Gospel and using communication techniques to present a “winsome witness” to the Gospel. He talked about the problem that Lutherans face when discussing witnessing. In his 2006 Major Applied Project, Ron Rall quotes Dr. Kolb as saying:

The problem had to do with saying ‘winsomely’ winsomely. I wanted to avoid a term which would seem to make the effect and power of the Word somehow dependent on our formulation of its message. This particular problem might be labeled the ‘synergism of the convert-er.’ We are familiar with the synergism of the convertee...Like all heresies, the synergism of the converter has its opposite number, its mirror image: belief in a kind of magical working of of the Word. Between these two poles...the synergism of the converter and the magical belief that the Word works without our working at it...the Church attempts to fulfill its God-given task of making disciples. Or, better said, we function as God’s coworkers (1 Cor. 3:9) in the tension between a doctrine of creation which places in our hands all the tools of human communication, research, and insight on the one hand, and on the other hand, our confidence that God alone works conversion and salvation through His Word, and that often in ways which defy our explanation.¹⁹

The tension of how and when to use “tools of human communication, research, and insight” in service to God’s means of grace is quite apparent in Kolb’s comments. We cannot call these “tools” means of grace since they do not deliver God’s grace and

¹⁹Robert Kolb as quoted in Ron Rall, “The Effectiveness of Illustrations in Preaching: Understanding and Retaining Biblical Truths” (D. Min. MAP, Concordia Seminary, 2006), 21.

produce faith. Yet they are gifts of creation given by God. Gifts that may open ears and minds to hear God's Word.

Such hearing is essential for conversion and regeneration because it is the instrument of the Holy Spirit. The Formula of Concord reminds us:

All who would be saved must hear this preaching, for the preaching and the hearing of God's Word are the Holy Spirit's instruments in, with, and through which he wills to act efficaciously, to convert men to God, and to work in them both to will and achieve.²⁰

The Formula of Concord further explains:

Through this means (namely, the preaching and hearing of his Word) God is active, breaks our hearts, and draws man, so that through the preaching of the law man learns to know his sins and the wrath of God and experiences genuine terror, contrition, and sorrow in his heart, and through the preaching of and meditation upon the holy Gospel of the gracious forgiveness of sins in Christ there is kindled in him a spark of faith which accepts forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake and comforts itself with the promise of the Gospel. And in this way, the Holy Spirit, who works all of this, is introduced into the heart.²¹

In preaching, the activity of the Holy Spirit and the hearing of God's Word are important in the creation, nurture and preservation of faith. Yet this does not negate the preacher's role in the proclamation of God's Word. Indeed, preachers are to "handle the Word well –both in content and manner of presenting that content."²²

The Lutheran Confessions acknowledge that free will in external matters is still somewhat present. "Even after the Fall," states the Formula of Concord, "man still has something of a free will in these external matters, so that he can go to church, listen to the sermon, or not listen to it."²³ Clearly, people can decide to listen to a sermon or not.

²⁰ The Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article II, 52, Theodore Tappert, editor and translator, *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 531.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 531.54.

²² Glenn Nielsen, "No Longer Dinosaurs: Relating Lutheran Homiletics and Communication Practice," *Concordia Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (January, 1999), 21.

²³ Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article II, 531.53.

Thus, preachers ought to equip themselves with all the communication tools they can muster and make every effort to hone their rhetorical skills in order to help their hearers *make the decision to listen*. Dr. Glenn Nielsen explains:

No doubt one factor in such a decision is how well that message is being communicated. Poorly presented, the sermon may be ignored for re-reading the bulletin, (or, as in the case of my children, circling every “the” in the bulletin), thinking about the noon meal, or staring out a window or at the stained glass. On the other hand, rhetorical skill employed well may allow for the Word to be diligently and earnestly heard. The role of the preacher thus necessitates a careful consideration of not only what will be said in faithfulness to the Word but also how the sermon will be heard so that the people may listen and meditate upon it.²⁴

To put it another way, preachers must be ready to hold their confidence in the divine power and efficacy of God’s Word in tension with the need to develop and effectively use communications skills in service to the Gospel.

This tension is apparent in other outreach practices. In an article on the practice of evangelism and congregational outreach, Dr. David Peter noted the church’s need to be faithful to Scripture, especially Scripture’s teaching on justification by grace through faith in Christ, and the church’s need to use insights from sociology and marketing for outreach purposes. In this article Dr. Peter speaks of faithfulness to the message of the Gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace as the vertical dimension of evangelism and outreach. Human effort and the use of sociological insights, marketing, and communications skills, on the other hand, are relegated to the horizontal dimension. He writes:

The work of the Holy Spirit in the vertical dimension is primary. Our actions --our “willing and exerting”—which are performed in the horizontal dimension, are secondary. Yet human activity is necessary for bringing the Word of the Gospel into contexts in which unregenerate people will hear it and through which the Holy Spirit works faith. In this sense the vertical dimension –the divinely

²⁴ Glenn Nielsen, “No Longer Dinosaurs,” 21-22.

appointed means of grace—is essential. It is the *esse* of evangelism. But the horizontal dimension—the use of outreach methods and strategies guided by an understanding of human cultures, communication, and relationships—is also valuable in a ministerial role.²⁵

Peter proposes that the error of many LCMS churches is that “they collapse the practice of evangelism and outreach into one of the two dimensions.”²⁶

Some will reduce the church’s mission to the horizontal dimension and will depend on the latest “proven method” for marketing the church while neglecting its theological implications. Others will reduce evangelism to the vertical dimension and will reject the instrumental role that human efforts (including strategies that respond to changing cultures and contexts) have in outreach.²⁷

While the tension between these two dimensions is obvious to any preacher, pitting them against each other creates a false dichotomy that actually hinders the Gospel. It is true that no one will be saved apart from God’s means of grace. The message of the Gospel must be presented in all its fullness and with clarity. This is primary. But First Article insights from sociology, communication theory and marketing can be used to expose people to the message of the Gospel through which they are brought to faith in Christ. To put it another way, proclamation is concerned with the “what” of God’s message, the content, and “communication (is concerned) with the ‘how,’ the manner in which the message is delivered.”²⁸ The proclamation is more important than the communication, but both are important and God-given.

Since rhetorical devices, along with other communication tools, are First Article gifts and, when used properly, servants to God’s means of grace, then preachers are free to use them. Indeed, as stewards of all of God’s good and gracious gifts, it would be

²⁵ David Peter, “A Framework for the Practice of Evangelism and Congregational Outreach,” *Concordia Journal*, Vol 30, No. 3 (July, 2004): 215.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 215.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 215.

²⁸ Rall, “The Effectiveness,” 24.

unthinkable not to use them. In the final analysis, preachers live in the tension of being faithful to God's Word and intentionally using "worldly" devices and insights that may help the Word of God to be heard. There is a balance to be maintained here, not an either/or approach. In the words of Glenn Nielsen:

We preach for the One who has called us into this ministry. We preach Him for those entrusted to our care. Yes, we proclaim the One slain on the cross and gloriously brought back to life by His Father, and in doing so, we seek to bring our talents, knowledge, our skills, including those in the realm of communication, into the service of that treasured Gospel.²⁹

Summary

The rhetorical device of humor is not a means of grace and cannot "deliver the goods" when it comes to conversion, regeneration and sanctification. The riches of God's grace are imparted by the Holy Spirit through the proclamation and the hearing of God's Word of Law and Gospel. Yet a mechanical hearing of God's Word will not do. Simply hearing words in a sermon is not a magical formula that awakens faith and empowers Christians to lead lives of service and dedication to God. Rather, the hearing must be *perceptive hearing*, that is to say, hearing words that are comprehended, understood, and meditated upon. For this reason, preachers make use of communication techniques such as humor to encourage and enhance such hearing. Dangers are involved in using the rhetorical device of humor – and these dangers will be addressed in the next chapter of this project. But as long as preachers use humor and other communications skills to drive home the point of God's Word, being careful not to overshadow God's Word, humor and communication skills will be used *in service to the Gospel*.

²⁹ Glenn Nielsen, "No Longer Dinosaurs: Relating Lutheran Homiletics and Communication Practice," *Concordia Journal*, Vol 25, No. 1 (January, 1999), 29.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PROJECT IN CONTEXT OF RECENT RESEARCH

Introduction

“The intellectual pursuit of attempting to understand laughter scares me,” confesses author and Bible scholar, Erik Thoennes. “In some ways,” he adds, “laughter defies explanation and definition. Humor’s resistance to exegesis seems to be a part of the magic.”³⁰ Thoennes’ words have the ring of truth about them. A very academic and atomistic approach to humor would not only be a complex and trying task, but would also likely suck all the fun out the topic! However, if the effects and usefulness of humor in preaching are to be addressed and understood with even a modicum of clarity, then the topic must be examined with a certain amount of academic rigor. Research should be conducted on humor’s impact on speaking and teaching, particularly when it comes to humor’s ability to move or persuade the speaker’s hearers. Furthermore, the current views on humor’s usefulness in communication held by various speakers and communication experts should be examined. Such an examination may offer numerous insights regarding the appropriateness and inappropriateness of various types of humor in the task of preaching. This study, therefore, will consider how humor impacts a

³⁰ Erik Thoennes, “Laughing Through the Tears: The Redemptive Role of Humor in a Fallen World,” *Presbyterian*, 33/2, Fall 2007, 72.

speaker's ability to persuade by examining how humor relates to Aristotle's three means to persuade. It will also consider which types of humor are appropriate and inappropriate in the task of preaching by investigating current views on humor's role in communication held by various experts.

Humor in Aristotle's Three Means to Persuade

In his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle postulates that there are three means to persuasion,³¹ that is to say, there are three means that are highly effective in working a change in people's thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors. These means are: *pathos*, which is concerned with the emotions and tendencies of an audience; *logos*, which deals with the arguments and proofs of a presentation; and *ethos*, which has to do with the moral character of the speaker.

While Christian preachers can benefit considerably from Aristotle's elucidation of these three means, they must also be cognizant of Aristotle's worldview and biases. According to Aristotle, the goal of persuasion is to win people over to the speaker's way of thinking through the speaker's rhetorical skill and the wisdom of his arguments. He is to build his case by using all the devices available to him. In a word, success and change are *dependent on the speaker*.

Contrast this, then, to what God's Word says about preaching and Christian witnessing. The goal of Christian preaching and witnessing (Christian persuasion if you will) is to gain a hearing, convey good news, and establish a connection with the Triune God. It is not so much about presenting arguments, but about introducing people to Jesus

³¹ Aristotle, *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, "Rhetoric," edited by Richard McKeon and translated by W. R. Roberts (New York: Random House, 1941), 1356a, 1-35.

--giving them a good look at the Savior. Further, the success of this activity does not depend on the speaker and his skill, but on the Holy Spirit working through God's Word. It is the Holy Spirit who opens and changes hearts and minds so that people come to know and rely on their Savior. Thus, the goal, motivation and power of Christian persuasion are significantly different from the goal, motivation and power of the persuasion presented by Aristotle.

Perhaps the greatest difficulty in using Aristotle's means to persuade in a Christian context is maintaining a proper understanding of the preacher's goal in his attempts to persuade. In other words, preachers need to be keenly aware of what they are trying to persuade people to do. So often preachers are tempted to think that a change of heart and the creation of faith in Christ are achieved through their persuasive powers -- through the strength and logic of their arguments. Given enough rhetorical skill and apologetic cleverness, so the thinking goes, the preacher will break through the hearer's hardness of heart and win him to Christ. Yet conversion is impossible without the Holy Spirit working through the saving message of Christ. The changes that occur in a person's heart, attitudes, character, and behavior when he comes to faith in Jesus Christ are produced by the power of the Gospel, not by the persuasive powers of the preacher. The Gospel is "the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16, NIV).

This is not to say that preachers should abandon their attempts to persuade. Rather, they should understand that their communications skills (including the use of Aristotle's three means) may be utilized to persuade their hearers to greater faith, a greater understanding of God's Word, and a greater willingness to hear the saving message of

Jesus Christ. Faith is created by the Holy Spirit who uses the Gospel to engender trust in Christ. One cannot persuade a person to faith. But a preacher can use persuasion to teach and gain a thoughtful hearing of the Gospel.

Thus, using Aristotle's three means to persuade in the Christian context may be useful in achieving godly goals, albeit not the creation of faith itself. Consequently, this project will consider how humor relates to Aristotle's three means to persuade and how this relationship may prove beneficial to the task of preaching.

Humor as it Relates to Ethos

According to Aristotle, *ethos*, that is, the moral character of the speaker, is a means to persuade people. If the audience perceives the speaker to be moral and worthy of confidence, his speech will more likely be granted a favorable reception. The more the audience trusts and likes the speaker, the more readily they will accept his message and be persuaded by it. Aristotle wrote, "Persuasion is achieved by the speaker's personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible. We believe good men more fully and more readily than others."³² In other words, one's manner of life and the sincerity of one's convictions do make a difference in a speaker's attempts to persuade.

The importance of the speaker's manner of life and the sincerity of his convictions in his attempts to persuade is especially great for the preacher of the Gospel. As Paul pointed out to Timothy in so many of Paul's admonitions to the young pastor, preachers preach sermons with their words and with their manner of life. Timothy was to "watch

³² Ibid., 1356b, 4-5.

his life and doctrine closely”(1 Timothy 4:16). He was to “preach the Word in season and out of season” and “set an example for believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith, and in purity” (2 Timothy 4:2 and 1 Timothy 4:12). Richard Caemmerer picks up this idea in his book, *Preaching for the Church*. According to Caemmerer, a preacher’s power to persuade is especially strong because of his life and ministry of love –because he “approaches people over a total front.”³³ Caemmerer writes:

When people look at a preacher, they interpret his language and pay attention to him because of everything that they know about him. This should make the pastor’s preaching especially helpful. He meets people in many areas of life. He comforts the sick and dying, counsels families, helps the needy and doubting, enjoys himself with people at play, buys in the shops of his community, votes at its polls... When people know a preacher, they are looking at his message through a lens ground to their fit by their entire acquaintance with him... Aristotle’s first proof of persuasion was that the hearer find the speaker trustworthy. Our Lord said it even more bluntly: “Ye are witnesses of these things” (Luke 24:48).³⁴

To be sure, the ethos of a preacher is very important and a favorable character increases his power to persuade. But how does humor contribute to ethos? How does it aid ethos in persuasion? To put it simply, humor helps in capturing the good will of the audience. It gives the impression that the speaker is clever, or humble, or fun. Used properly, humor keeps the speaker from being viewed as self-righteous or pedantic. In short, *humorous preachers are likeable*.

In my introductory remarks I mentioned that the participants in Thom Rainer’s study on why people join a church indicated that they view humorous preachers as *authentic*. After listing *humorous* as one of the words used to describe authentic pastors, Rainer

³³ Richard Caemmerer, *Preaching for the Church* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 43.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 43-44.

goes on to state that “the authenticity of the pastor was mentioned as the most positive character trait noticed by the formerly unchurched.”³⁵ And so humor can be a beneficial element in a preacher’s ethos, causing him to be perceived as more authentic and increasing his chances of being heard.

In *Humor as an Instructional Defibrillator*, author Ron Berk discusses at length the need for teachers and students to make a “connection.” Too often students fear teachers and view them as “weird” (Berk’s word).³⁶ Even before a student enters the classroom, barriers separate him from his teacher. “Humor,” says Berk, “can chop down, smash, demolish, even vaporize (these) pre-existing barriers... It opens up communication that’s not based on fear and intimidation. Instead, the communication is positive, constructive, and relaxed.”³⁷ Students view the humorous teacher as trustworthy and approachable – and become more receptive to what he is trying to communicate to them.

A humorous preacher and his congregation can establish this kind of connection. The perception that the preacher is trustworthy and approachable will be especially strong when he uses self-deprecating humor. Commenting on how to hold a congregation’s attention, John Darkeford writes, “A preacher can use self-deprecating humor to disarm the stereotype of clergy as arrogant or opinionated... The humor advocated here is the kind that gives the impression of humility and makes the listener feel relaxed and receptive.”³⁸

Elaine Lundberg and Cheryl Thurston echo this theme when they encourage teachers to admit their mistakes and laugh at them. This not only shows the authenticity and

³⁵ Thom Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 61.

³⁶ Ronald Berk, *Humor as an Instructional Defibrillator* (Sterling: Stylus, 2002), 59.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁸ John Drakeford, *Humor in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 42-43.

approachability of a teacher, but it also shows students that “mistakes are not the end of the world.” This kind of humor, says Lundberg and Thurston, “helps people feel that they are not alone.”³⁹

It can be argued that making light of one’s self conveys a sense of humanness and humility that is extremely attractive to people. In the pulpit, it may demonstrate a spirit of fun and project an image of a preacher who takes the Word of God seriously, but who does not take himself too seriously. Such a preacher will be viewed as authentic, humble, and approachable –and will have ready and willing listeners. There can be little doubt, then, that humor contributes significantly and positively to the ethos of a preacher.

Humor as it Relates to Pathos

Another of Aristotle’s means of persuasion is *pathos*, that is, putting the hearer into an appropriate state of mind. It is an appeal based on the hearer’s emotions, tendencies, and attitudes. One might even call it “eliciting” emotions.

In his book *Faithful Persuasion*, David Cunningham uses pathos in a wider sense –a sense which is consistent with Aristotle’s understanding. Cunningham writes, “Persuasion with reference to the ‘pathos’ of the audience concerns not only emotions, but also the wide variety of ways in which the state or condition of the audience affects the persuasive appeal of the speech.”⁴⁰ In other words, constructing a persuasive speech involves keeping the attitudes and the background of your hearers in mind. “People have the best chance of developing an effective message,” say Ronald Adler and George

³⁹ Elaine Lundberg and Cheryl Thurston, *If They’re Laughing, They Just Might Be Listening* (Fort Collins: Cottonwood Press, 1992), 32.

⁴⁰ David Cunningham, *Faithful Persuasion* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 43.

Rodman, “when they understand the other person’s point of view.”⁴¹ Construct a speech around the hearer’s point of the view. Bond with the audience. The less the preacher and the audience have in common, the less persuasive the preacher’s appeal will be. The preacher needs to build rapport with his hearers.

Effective preachers know their audiences. They build rapport with their audiences so they can move and change them with the Word of God, particularly with God’s Word of Law and Gospel. And humor can be said to be an aid in establishing rapport because everyone enjoys a good laugh. People prefer joy to sorrow; a smile to a frown. Love of humor is something we have in common. Thom Rainer has pointed out that humor can unite people and get them to work together. He quotes a seasoned pastor who said, “You find a church that’s reaching people, and you’ll find a church that laughs together.”⁴²

Humor can be a tie that binds.

After stressing a speaker’s need to establish rapport with his audience, John Drakeford shares an experience he had speaking to the inmates of a penitentiary. They were not impressed by his professional qualifications and only begrudgingly agreed to listen to him. Yet by using humor, particularly in his opening remarks, the inmates warmed up to him. After speaking ten minutes, the leader of the group handed him the session for the rest of the hour. “Humor had given me possession of my audience,” states Drakeford.⁴³

After sharing this experience, Drakeford expounds his point by relaying the story of a black 19th century preacher named John Jasper who gained rapport with a cynical newspaper reporter by using humor. After Jasper delivered a humorous sermon about the

⁴¹ Ronald Adler and George Rodman, *Understanding Human Communication* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 22.

⁴² Thom Rainer, *Surprising Insights*, 164.

⁴³ Drakeford, *Humor in Preaching*, 34.

sun moving around the earth, the reporter was won over by the man's oratory. He became convinced –not that the sun moved, “but that Jasper was a sincere, great man.”⁴⁴

Drakeford's experience and observation concerning John Jasper underscore the need for preachers, teachers and other speakers to neutralize the potential hostility of an audience. Thankfully, Ronald Adler and George Rodman offer two guidelines for handling a hostile audience: “(1) show that you understand their point of view and (2) if possible, use appropriate humor.”⁴⁵

A good example of a speaker neutralizing the hostility of an audience using both of these guidelines was Barbara Bush who was invited to speak at the commencement exercises at Wellesley College in 1990. After the invitation was announced, a number of students protested the choice of Mrs. Bush as the commencement speaker because Mrs. Bush's fame and recognition were gained through *her husband's achievements*.

Even though she knew of the protest, Mrs. Bush agreed to speak at the commencement. During her speech, Mrs. Bush diffused most of the hostility by offering a speech that showed understanding and a wonderful lighthearted quality:

For over fifty years, it was said that the winner of Wellesley's annual hoop race would be the first to get married. Now they say the winner will be the first to become a C.E.O. Both of these stereotypes show too little tolerance...So I offer you today a new legend: the winner of the hoop race will be the first to realize her dream, not society's dream, but her own personal dream.⁴⁶

This corresponds with the experiences of some preachers who know their hearers well and understand that they have difficulty with some of the hard teachings of Scripture. It follows, then, that preachers who find themselves in this kind of situation can bond with

⁴⁴ Ibid., 35.

⁴⁵ Adler and Rodman, *Understanding*, 444.

⁴⁶ Barbara Bush, as quoted in Adler and Rodman, *Understanding*, 444.

their hearers by acknowledging the difficulty of that teaching and using humor to make the teaching more palatable. Using humor to make difficult teachings more palatable is a major premise of John Drakeford in his book *Humor in Preaching*. Drakeford writes of his experiences giving a lecture called *Surviving the Sex Talk With Your Children* to conservative church groups. At the beginning of his presentation he and his audience would be noticeably and understandably uncomfortable. In Drakeford's own words, the audience looked "somewhat grim and serious."⁴⁷ This did not last long, however, since he used humor to diffuse the situation. Drakeford writes:

To emphasize the importance of timing I would say, "One of the best ways of knowing when to talk to your child about sexuality is to listen for a question," and then I would tell the following story:

Johnny has just come in from school and addresses his father.

"Daddy, there's something I need to ask you."

"What is it, Son?"

"Daddy, where did I come from?"

The father reaches over and picks up the diagrams he has nearby for just such a situation as this and spends the next forty-five minutes explaining the birth processes. Inwardly congratulating himself on a job well done, he asks, "Does that answer your question?"

"Not exactly."

"What do you mean, not exactly?"

"Well, Billy Jones up the street says he came from Arkansas, and I was wondering where I came from."

The roar of response put everyone at ease, and in the course of many years of giving this talk to conservative groups, I never had any objections. Humor had saved the day.⁴⁸

I have used this technique myself on a number of occasions. During a sermon about five years ago, I wanted to warn my members to stay away from certain inspirational speakers whose messages are totally devoid of Christ crucified and risen from the dead.⁴⁹ I wanted to show that, because these speakers say nothing about sin and the grace of God

⁴⁷ Drakeford, *Humor in Preaching*, 41.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁴⁹ Robert Schuller, Joyce Meyer and Kenneth Copeland were the speakers I had in mind.

in Christ, they are not helping people come to know Jesus and get to heaven. I began by saying, “These inspirational speakers may offer you some good, practical advice about life. I mean, when they tell you not to compare your wife’s cooking with your mother’s cooking, that’s very good advice. Of course, if you enjoy sleeping on the couch, go ahead and compare your wife’s cooking to your mother’s.” I got a very big laugh after that last comment, and while they were still smiling I added, “But what good is that advice if they’re not directing people to Jesus? What good are these speakers if they’re not teaching people the way of salvation? Mere entertainment doesn’t save you, it doesn’t build your faith in Christ.” Many people in our culture swear by these inspirational speakers. To say anything against them would be like trashing Mr. Rogers and his wonderful neighborhood of *Make Believe* in their eyes. Yet I was able to present a warning against these speakers that was relatively easy to accept. Humor does ease the blow of difficult teachings and the tension of uncomfortable situations.

In the Walt Disney movie *Mary Poppins*, the main character of the same name sings, “A spoon full of sugar helps the medicine go down.” The truths of Scripture are medicine for the soul, but sometimes they are difficult to accept and internalize. A dose of humor may possibly be that metaphorical spoon full of sugar that makes the medicine go down –and help stay down. Used properly, humor in preaching may be a significant aid in helping a preacher establish rapport with his hearers. The preacher who understands his congregation, having *pathos* securely under his belt, will likely see his parishioners’ need for laughter and come across many opportunities to bond with them using humor.

Humor as it Relates to Pathos in Service to Logos

Aristotle's third means for persuasion is *logos*, or the argument itself. Aristotle writes, "Persuasion is effected through the speech itself when we have proved a truth or an apparent truth by means of the persuasive arguments suitable to the case in question."⁵⁰ In church jargon we call this the *message*, the content that the preacher is trying to proclaim by using language. Sermons that persuade and move people to greater faith are not merely products of a preacher's character (*ethos*) and understanding of his audience (*pathos*). Such sermons are constructed with language, ideas presented in a logical progression, and demonstrations of Biblical truth. In other words, a sermon must have substance and be understandable to be truly persuasive.

But how can humor strengthen the *logos*? Humor is an aid in conveying the *logos* or message because it captures the attention of the audience. Capturing the hearer's attention is really an element of *pathos* because it speaks to the condition of the audience. However, this element of *pathos* serves the *logos* because it engages the hearer and helps the message be heard. Writing on student engagement in the college class setting, Ron Berk comments:

Students enter our classrooms with their own baggage of personal distractions, or, as Professor Charles Kingsfield of the *Paper Chase* called it, "a mind full of mush." We do not know what is on their minds when they sit down. It could be a fight with a significant other, chapped lips, unwanted body hair, ruptured spleen, or a monkey named Jerome. Our job is to snap them to attention and concentrate it on the topic for the day –to be fully engaged in learning activities.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Aristotle, *The Basic Works*, "Rhetoric," 1356a 19-21.

⁵¹ Berk, *Humor as an Instructional*, 5.

According to Berk, teachers can snap students to attention and engage them in learning activities by using humor. Humor can serve as a “hook” –something that can “pull students into the learning process to engage their emotions and focus their minds.”⁵²

Berk isn’t alone in this assessment of humor’s power to engage. In his treatment of winning people’s attention, Paul Swets recommends that speakers put their “best self” forward. This best self is the self that is “open, *humorous*, interested in other people...(and) eager to learn.”⁵³ Adler and Rodman encourage speakers to personalize their speeches in order to engage their audiences. They suggest, “If you happen to be good at storytelling, make a narration part of your speech. If *humor is a personal strength*, be funny.”⁵⁴

Moreover, most preachers have personally experienced humor’s power to engage listeners. Many a preacher has experienced the phenomenon of watching his church members drift off during a sermon only to see them roused by a funny expression or story. Humor rouses the mind so that other material can get in.

John Drakeford postulates that people today find it difficult to pay attention because they are not relaxed enough. “The hectic, stressful pace of life today makes it difficult for people to pay attention to the preacher. People aren’t relaxed enough to give their full attention.”⁵⁵ One key to relaxing hearers, according to Drakeford, is laughter. He writes:

In laughter of less intensity, the relaxation factor is evident in people who, after a spell of laughter, find it difficult to write or thread a needle or perform any other activity requiring fine muscle coordination. A further

⁵² Ibid., 5.

⁵³ Paul Swets, *The Art of Talking So That People Will Listen to You: Getting Through to Family, Friends, and Business Associates* (Englewood Cliffs: A Spectrum Book, 1983), 13.

⁵⁴ Adler and Rodman, *Understanding*, 416.

⁵⁵ Drakeford, *Humor in Preaching*, 40.

indication of this relaxed condition is a feeling of well-being...Because of this relaxing effect, the speaker who uses humor in his sermons may discover himself ministering to a relaxed, responsive congregation that will be a joy and delight to him.⁵⁶

Humor's ability to relax people and reduce stress is affirmed by Ron Berk's research. While studies measuring the reduction of stress hormones through the use of humor and laughter proved inconclusive, ample evidence indicates that humor and laughter relax muscles and increase the strength of the immune system's defenses.⁵⁷ Not only does a laughing person *feel* a sense of well being, but he also experiences something that benefits him physiologically.

Obviously, a congregation that is relaxed and happy will be more responsive to a preacher than a congregation that is tense and frustrated. Consequently, humor does help people become more receptive to a preacher's logos.

Humor as it Relates to Logos

Up to this point I have not dealt with the issue of whether humor can be used to communicate the logos itself. Can humor be used to make a serious point? Can it be used to convey understanding and a reasonable argument?

Some have argued that humor cannot be used to make a sermon point. Humor is for entertainment and does not relate to sermon topics. Yet in many books on the use of humor in preaching and teaching, the authors insist that humor be used to make a point and that it only be used when it bears a natural relationship with the topic. "Humor can

⁵⁶ Ibid., 40-41.

⁵⁷ Berk, *Humor as an Instructional*, 49-54.

sometimes be distracting when it bears no natural relationship to what the students are studying.”⁵⁸ “If humor is natural to a preacher, then it should be used in preaching; but one must never ‘import’ jokes just to make the congregation laugh.”⁵⁹ “If you happen to know or can find a joke that is appropriate to your subject and occasion, it can help you build audience interest...Be sure, though, that the joke is appropriate to the audience, as well as the occasion and you as a speaker.”⁶⁰ Rudolph Verderber, former professor of Communication at the University of Cincinnati, suggests that to be highly effective in communication, one should “relate humor to the topic. If you discover an amusing way of developing some point in your speech, your audience will listen.”⁶¹ If so many authors insist that humor can and should be used to make a point, then it is likely that humor can be used in a natural relationship with what the preacher is talking about. It can be used to make a point.

But do people remember a serious point made by using humor? Does it aid in the retention of the logos? Numerous authors have made that claim. Lundberg and Thurston suggest that humor is a “hook” that “triggers recall.”⁶² Berk cites some evidence that laughter in a classroom increases memory.⁶³ Yet this claim lacks sufficient evidence to be taken at face value. Is there anything else that suggests that humor aids in the retention of a message, particularly points in a sermon?

The key may be to understand the nature of narrative preaching or story telling. Since

⁵⁸ Lundberg and Thurston, *If They're Laughing*, 12.

⁵⁹ Warren Wiersbe, *Preaching and Teaching with Imagination* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1994), 275.

⁶⁰ Adler and Rodman, *Understanding*, 364

⁶¹ Rudolph Verderber, *Communicate!* (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1990), 353.

⁶² Lundberg and Thurston, *If They're Laughing*, 9.

⁶³ Berk, *Humor as an Instructional*, 49.

humor used in making a sermon point often comes in the form of a story, it shares some of the qualities of narrative preaching and story telling. Because stories encourage audience participation, they are usually easy to remember. Quoting Robert Hughes and Robert Kysar to illustrate the preacher's need to use vivid images and stories in sermons for people living in a postmodern age, Glenn Nielsen states:

People carry away from the sermon mental pictures evoked by the preacher's words; the propositions of the sermons are quickly jettisoned from memory. The images and stories are their key to the message of the sermon. If we want people to remember our sermons (and who does not?), and if they remember stories and images, then we need to fashion those carefully so that they carry the focus and function of the sermon.⁶⁴

People remember vivid images and stories, and humorous pictures and stories are no exception. Most preachers spend less time memorizing the stories in their sermons than they spend memorizing other material. They spend even less time memorizing funny stories --*because stories, especially funny stories, are easy to remember*. It is no great stretch, then, to conclude that humor helps in the retention of sermon points.

But what about using humor to communicate the Scriptural teachings of Law and Gospel? Since almost every verse in the Bible can be characterized as a teaching of the Law, Gospel, or both, asking whether humor can be utilized to communicate these teachings is not only legitimate, but also extremely important to the task of preaching. Unfortunately, I have not encountered anything in my research which deals specifically with the use of humor in preaching Law and Gospel. I will, therefore, offer some my own thoughts.

⁶⁴ Glenn Nielsen, "Preaching Doctrine in a Postmodern Age," *Concordia Journal*, Vol. 27, No. 1, January 2001, 25.

It is almost self-evident that humor can be used to convey the Law. In the section *Humor as it Relates to Pathos*, presented earlier in this chapter, it was stated that humor can be used to ease the tension caused by some of the difficult teachings in the Bible. These difficult teachings are oftentimes teachings of the Law. These are teachings that cause us to squirm because they call us to repent and to forsake the status quo which might be comfortable to us. They call us to die to self. Several writers have observed that using humor in teaching these kinds of doctrines often eases tension so that hearers can hear and accept the message. In his book *Marketplace Preaching: How to Return the Sermon to Where It Belongs*, author Calvin Miller advises, “First of all, the pastor must watch for those kinds of sermons that tend to become tense and remain too tense for people to follow. Remember that tension can be broken by such things as comic relief (the possible telling of a joke) or the using of a lighthearted illustration.”⁶⁵ It follows, then, that humor can be used in preaching the Law and that its use in preaching the Law has beneficial effects.

In addition to this, humor is often used in sermons to underscore our human weaknesses and foibles. In a sense, we laugh at our puny and pathetic attempts to live up to God’s standards. Or we smile nervously at the gigantic gap between our morality and God’s perfection. Although not an exaggeration, the contrast between our goodness and God’s goodness borders on the absurd. In short, using humor to preach the Law is possible and humor may even lend itself to the preaching of the Law.

Using humor to communicate the Gospel, on the other hand, is a bit problematic. There is nothing humorous about the events of Jesus’ passion and death. The cross

⁶⁵ Calvin Miller, *Marketplace Preaching: How to Return the Sermon to Where it Belongs* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 161-162.

shows us the tremendous price that Jesus paid for the redemption of the world. Only an insensitive fool would find amusement in the cross of Jesus Christ. David Buttrick elaborates on this when he writes, “While there may be passages from scripture that are hilarious (in some ways, profoundly, Christian faith *is* a laughing matter!), the gospel is ultimately serious, for it speaks of a crucified Christ to the deepest levels of human self-understanding.”⁶⁶ Clearly, Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross is no laughing matter.

However, it has been my experience that humor can be used –and used effectively— to explain and describe the fruit of the Gospel. A preacher may talk about the Christian’s forgiveness in Christ in terms of God’s smiling face. Apart from Christ, God’s face would frown (metaphorically speaking) at us. Apart from Christ, our sins would cause God’s brows to knit together angrily. But because Jesus has redeemed us, God’s face beams on us. When God looks at the blood bought Christian, he grins from ear to ear. This image of God smiling at us is lighthearted and playful. Its humor reflects our joy in the Lord. Consider, too, the whole image of a redeemed sinner approaching God as a dear child approaches his dear father. This image is enough to make any parent smile – because we know how bold kids are when they want something. They unabashedly approach their parents with every request imaginable!

God made us and Jesus redeemed us to be joyful people –a people created and redeemed to enjoy a close, happy, and loving relationship with God. As Jesus reminds us in John 15:11, “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete” (NIV). Thus, using humor in proclaiming the Gospel often takes the form

⁶⁶ David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 95.

of describing the joy Christians have because of their status as God’s children and the joy they experience as they live under a risen (not a dead) Savior. This kind of humor is descriptive, illustrating the kind of changes that are produced by the Gospel. While it is very unlikely that a preacher can utilize humor in preaching Christ crucified, he can use it to convey something of the joy of the resurrection and the joy and character of our new life in Christ.

Humor can be used to make a point. Often it is an incidental part of a story – the preacher sharing some quirky characteristic of a great saint in his former parish. Yet humor can be used to convey the *logos itself*. Humor can be used as a mirror, revealing our weaknesses and our need for God. Used creatively and descriptively, it can also convey the sweetness of the Gospel.

Current Views on Appropriate and Inappropriate Humor

Humor is used in a wide variety of fields and disciplines, the most obvious of which is the entertainment industry. In the words of Cosmo Brown, one of the lead characters in the 1952 movie *Singin’ in the Rain*:

Make ‘em laugh. Make laugh.
Don’t you know everyone wants to laugh? (Ha ha!)
My dad said, “Be an actor my son,
But be a comical one.
They’ll be standing in lines
For those honky tonk monkeyshines.”⁶⁷

However, since the primary and often sole goal of this use of humor is to evoke

⁶⁷ This is the refrain for “Make ‘Em Laugh,” one of well known songs from MGM’s 1952 musical *Singin’ in the Rain*; Words by Arthur Freed and music by Nacio Herb Brown –considered by many to be a near-plagiarism of Cole Porter’s “Be a Clown.”

laughter in a recreational setting, this kind of humor often pushes the envelope when it comes to good taste and constructive communication. Comedians who will do and say anything for a laugh are all too common in today's climate of fierce competition among entertainers. Examining current views on humor in the entertainment industry, therefore, will not suite the purpose of this project. However, since humor is often used in the fields of teaching, public speaking and preaching for the sake of enhancing communication, I believe gauging current views on the use of humor in these areas will prove most beneficial. And so I will briefly examine the types of humor that teachers, homileticians, and communication experts consider effective or detrimental in delivering the messages that they want their hearers to receive.

Inappropriate Forms of Humor

Humor is a good and useful gift of God. Authors Cal and Rose Samra echo that sentiment when they write: "Holy humor...is a powerful peace-making and bridge-building tool that can be used to defuse anger and hatred, reduce tensions, and resolve conflicts."⁶⁸ Yet not all humor is "holy." Like all of God's gifts, humor can be abused and used for sinful purposes. It is absolutely necessary, therefore, for a Christian preacher to come to terms with which humor is appropriate for the preaching and teaching of God's Word, which humor is neutral, which humor is to be used with caution, and which humor is to be avoided altogether. To quote authors and educators Diana Loomans and Karen Kolberg:

There are two very distinct sides to the humor coin: the comic and the tragic. Humor can be a social lubricant or a social retardant in the

⁶⁸ Cal and Rose Samra, *Holy Humor: Inspirational Wit and Cartoon* (New York: Mastermind Limited, 1996), xxi.

educational setting. It can educate or denigrate, heal or harm, embrace or deface. It's a powerful communication tool, no matter which side is chosen. Ridicule has been used for thousands of years both to maintain the status quo as well as to change it.⁶⁹

Sexual Humor

Quoting Eph. 5:4 in his book, *Humor in Preaching*, John Drakeford flatly asserts that sexual jokes are “forbidden to Christians: ‘Dirty stories, foul talk, and course jokes –these are not for you’ (THE LIVING BIBLE).”⁷⁰ However, as he builds his case, it becomes clear that he means *off-color sexual humor* or humor that degrades God’s gift of sex.

Drakeford explains:

Christians do not need the outlet of sexual humor, for in the Bible they discover a wholesome view of sexuality. The Christian view of human sexuality is that it is creative (Genesis 1:22), unifying (Genesis 2:24), not to be exploited (Exodus 20:14) or perverted (Leviticus 18:22), and to be our servant rather than our master (Matthew 19:12).⁷¹

According to Drakeford, Christians have a wholesome and proper understanding of human sexuality. Consequently, off-color sexual jokes, i.e., humor that exploits and perverts sexuality, are counter productive to Christian preaching and teaching. The Christian view of sex as God’s precious gift to married couples is “altogether different from the view that underlies most sexual jokes.”⁷²

This view is affirmed by secular educator and author Ronald Berk. Commenting on offensive humor in the context of the classroom, Berk writes, “Regardless of the gender

⁶⁹ Loomans and Kolberg, *The Laughing*, 14.

⁷⁰ Drakeford, *Humor in Preaching*, 66.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 66

⁷² *Ibid.*, 66.

composition of your class, sexual humor is out of bounds as a teaching tool, unless that's what you're teaching."⁷³

Profanity

Profanity, according to Berk, is also to be avoided. While acknowledging its prevalence in today's culture, Berk cautions:

Expletives are heard just about everywhere...However, despite the increasing frequency of profane language around us, its use in jokes in the classroom is inappropriate and unnecessary, plus it cannot be bleeped out of our presentation. Whenever it occurs, its crudity debases the level of discourse and the "discourser."⁷⁴

The fallout from the use of offensive language should not be minimized, especially among young people. The embarrassment and shock caused by offensive language may cause irreparable damage to the relationship a speaker has with his hearers. In the case of a student, the student may even "stop coming to class to avoid the preceding feelings, the risk of a recurrence, or a confrontation with the perpetrator (YOU!)."⁷⁵ Most Christians realize that preachers are human and they appreciate it when preachers own up to their shortcomings. However, since preachers are to be above reproach (1 Tim. 3:2) and model the Christian life for other believers, it seems likely that a preacher's use of offensive language would cause significant embarrassment and shock among his hearers.

⁷³ Berk, *Humor as Instructional*, 18.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

Self-deprecating Humor

Almost all humorous people will acknowledge that humor is a very personal thing. Tastes in humor vary widely. One person may find the slapstick comedy of the *Three Stooges* hilarious, while another person may barely be able to tolerate their antics. One person may find the dry wit of Victor Borge extremely amusing and enjoyable, while another person may fall fast asleep during one of his concerts.⁷⁶ Yet some types of humor have almost universal appeal and far-reaching benefits. Some types of humor seem to lend themselves easily to the task of preaching and establishing a connection with hearers. Self-deprecating humor is one of these types.

Self-deprecating humor involves a speaker poking fun at himself or making light of himself. As was previously acknowledged in the section on how humor relates to the *ethos* of a preacher, the use of self-deprecating humor can “disarm the stereotype of clergy as arrogant”⁷⁷ and give the impression of humility. People identify with the preacher and regard him as authentic. Commenting on the motive for using self-deprecating humor and how it affects hearers, psychologist Avner Ziv writes:

A second motive for self-disparaging humor is to achieve appreciation. The (speaker) knows that the personal trait being ridiculed is present in others to some extent, too, and his self-disparagement enables them to identify with him... This identification can win sympathy, appreciation, and even love for the person who dares to touch and laugh at the weaknesses that exist in us, too.⁷⁸

The use of self-deprecating humor allows a preacher to identify with the humanity, problems and weaknesses of his hearers. It also conveys a sense of humility in the preacher—a quality that many people find lacking in the profession. This lack of humility

⁷⁶ Loomans and Kolberg, *The Laughing*, 13.

⁷⁷ Drakeford, *Humor in Preaching*, 42.

⁷⁸ Avner Ziv, *Personality and Sense of Humor* (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 1984), 61.

in a preacher is especially tragic because it reflects the loss of awe, reverence, and wonder over the privilege of speaking for God. In the words of homiletician Thomas Long, it “is good to be in the pulpit, but we are not there because we are good.”⁷⁹

Commenting on Karl Barth’s remarks regarding the preacher’s need for humility and humor, Long states further:

“Never lose a sense of humor about yourself.” Perhaps that line ought to be engraved on a plaque and placed on the back of the pulpit alongside the traditional quotation from John, “We would see Jesus.” The Johannine quote would remind us to take the task of preaching the gospel of Christ seriously; the other phrase would encourage us not to take ourselves too seriously while we are doing that task. Moreover, a sense of humor in worship is not only a sign of humility, but also of the gospel’s liberating power.⁸⁰

Humor and humility seem to go hand in hand. After discussing the common root of “humor” and “humility” (the Latin word “humus,” meaning “of the earth”), Cal and Rose Samra suggest that humor reminds us of our own fragility and earthiness. It is a gentle reminder of “our propensity to mess things up even when we have the best of intentions” and “our powerlessness apart from God.”⁸¹

All this suggests that self-deprecating humor is beneficial to both the preacher and his hearers. It aids a preacher in maintaining a sense of awe and humility in his preaching and allows his hearers to identify with him. His hearers begin to view him as authentic and sincere –and this creates an attitude of openness in which the preacher’s messages are heard and taken to heart. The preacher also enjoys the benefit of knowing that the laughter directed at him is unlikely to offend others since the laughter is not directed against them.

⁷⁹ Thomas Long, *The Witness of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox press, 1989), 16.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁸¹ Samra, *Holy Humor*, xxi.

But are there dangers involved in employing self-deprecating humor? Can it be used in such a way that the preacher's image among his members is hurt and his message hindered? Unfortunately, there may be a down side to using self-deprecating humor. In his examination of self-disparaging humor, Ziv has observed:

There is an additional aspect (of self-disparaging humor) that has not yet been mentioned –that is...the listener's feeling of superiority. The moment someone declares his weaknesses in public, others can have a feeling of comparative superiority, which, being pleasurable, is expressed in a smile or laughter.⁸²

Recognizing the danger of too much self-deprecating humor, professional speaker Joan Detz advises people not to overdo it. Knocking oneself down too much may cause the audience “to question your competence or reputation.”⁸³ Using too much self-deprecating humor or using self-deprecating humor that is too harsh may quickly cause people to wonder whether you belong in the pulpit or on the speaker's platform at all.

Avoiding self-deprecating humor altogether, however, is not the solution. According to Detz, a “light deprecating touch” is the perfect tool for getting and keeping the audience's attention. She uses the late Congressman Sonny Bono, known for his comedy sketches with his former wife Cher, as an example of this light touch in self-deprecating humor. Detz writes:

Sonny Bono marveled at being elected to Congress as a Republican: “The last thing in the world I thought I would be is a U. S. Congressman, given all the bobcat vests and Eskimo boots I used to wear.”⁸⁴

This suggests that a light, self-deprecating sense of humor is highly desirable in

⁸² Ziv, *Personality*, 64.

⁸³ Joan Detz, *It's Not What You Say, It's How You Say It* (New York: St. Martin's Griffen, 2000), 103.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 103.

speakers. Since such humor also has a way of keeping a speaker humble and giving the impression that the speaker is authentic, it follows that this type of humor ought to be sought and cultivated by speakers. Sadly, though, there are indications that suggest that this kind of humor is not as common as people believe and that cultivating it may require tremendous effort. After stating that a person's ability to laugh at himself is thought to be a very desirable trait, Avner Ziv shares the following story about an experience he had with a group of college students.

When my colleagues and I asked students if they used this type of humor, almost all of them answered in the affirmative. When asked to give an example from personal experience, they were dumbfounded; they stiffened and kept silent. Why does man's ability to laugh at himself have such a high social desirability? Maybe just because it is so rare?⁸⁵

Ziv goes on to suggest that, because people take themselves very seriously and devote a great deal of time and energy to presenting themselves in a good light, they are afraid to present themselves in a humorous way. They "suspect that presenting themselves humorously will hurt their image."⁸⁶ To put it another way, people say they like to laugh at themselves, but lack the courage to do it. It is a good idea in the abstract, but does not manifest itself in the concrete.

Clearly, not every speaker is comfortable using self-deprecating humor. Those who are, according to numerous experts, have a rare and precious gift. Because it is so rare and desirable, most experts encourage its development and use. However, since overuse of this type of humor may cause hearers to question the speaker's abilities, a light, self-deprecating touch seems most appropriate and beneficial when giving a speech or teaching a class.

⁸⁵ Ziv, *Personality*, 61.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

Private Jokes and Sarcasm

Most professional speakers, educators and homileticians take a dim view of using private jokes and sarcasm in human communication. Private jokes exclude people⁸⁷ and damage laugh-ready environments where “people feel safe and free to be uninhibited.”⁸⁸ Sarcasm, in its most basic form, is an expression of contempt or hostility toward a person or a group of people. David Buttrick observes:

Laughter prompted by sarcasm is seldom helpful. Sarcasm is always a form of veiled hostility; it is essentially murderous. Thus, when people laugh at witty sarcasms, they will usually laugh out of shared hatreds. Such laughter in a sermon is rather clearly alien to the gospel.⁸⁹

According to Buttrick, a preacher would do well to avoid sarcasm in preaching (and in all of his communications). A frustrated preacher may view sarcasm as fitting and cathartic, but there is a strong possibility that it may backfire and convey hostility.

Directing sarcastic comments at hearers is especially dangerous. Paul Swets writes:

When an audience senses that a speaker does not really care for them, they stop listening... People seem to have an uncanny ability for detecting how you really feel about them. They pick up clues not only from your word selection, but from your actions, your facial expressions, your tone of voice.⁹⁰

Swets concludes his remarks by suggesting that a speaker control his emotions. Emotions such as anger are a choice, Swets contends. They can be controlled.⁹¹

Sarcastic remarks often take the form of teasing, and so some experts suggest that even teasing should be carefully gauged. In discussing the place of teasing in the

⁸⁷ Lundberg and Thurston, *If They're Laughing*, 12.

⁸⁸ Berk, *Humor As An Instructional*, 23.

⁸⁹ Buttrick, *Homiletic*, 146.

⁹⁰ Swets, *The Art of Talking*, 20.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

classroom, Elaine Lundberg and Cheryl Thurston encourage teachers to practice teasing in order to “make people feel included, even special.” But they quickly add that this teasing must be kind. Teachers must be wary of using teasing as a weapon. Furthermore, they recommend that teachers carefully monitor students’ reactions because teasing can sting even when meant in the kindest way.⁹²

Imported Jokes

Interestingly, most experts discourage the use of jokes that are unrelated to the speaker’s topic. Author and noted homiletician Warren Wiersbe calls these kind of jokes “imported” since they are brought into a sermon simply to get a laugh.⁹³ Typically, these kind of jokes are employed when a speaker finds a joke so amusing that he feels compelled to “import” it into his speech (“This is *so funny*. How do I work it into my presentation?”). According to Wiersbe, imported jokes should be avoided because they contribute nothing to the sermon topic.⁹⁴

David Buttrick shares Wiersbe’s concern over telling jokes simply to get a laugh, especially when such jokes slip into sermon introductions. Buttrick explains:

As we all know, after-dinner speakers will often trot out a “funny” at the start of a speech. The strategy supposes that a joke will relax an audience, and, indeed, make an audience happy to hear a speaker... The after-dinner speech convention has been picked up by preachers. The problem of humor slipped into introductions is twofold: (1) The humor is almost always disconnected, or at best tenuously connected with the subject matter. Therefore, after a funny, preachers will probably have to design a second introduction to refocus a congregation. Funnies are apt to be tangential intrusions. (2)... Humor at the start of a sermon can set a tone of down-home triviality which, predictably, people will like, but from which few sermons can recover.⁹⁵

⁹² Lundberg and Thurston, *If They’re Laughing*, 36.

⁹³ Wiersbe, *Preaching and Teaching*, 275.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 275.

⁹⁵ Buttrick, *Homiletic*, 95.

Even famous professional speaker Caryl Rae Krannich cautions speakers not to begin a speech with a joke. According to Krannich, this method is overused and often misused. Moreover, she believes that “imported” jokes are far from beneficial. “A joke is misused,” Krannich writes, “when it in no way relates to the message of the speech. It doesn’t set the stage for the listeners or prepare them for your information or persuasion if it is irrelevant to the focus of your speech.”⁹⁶

A danger of jokes in general is the distinct possibility that the joke may be old and worn out. Such jokes may cause listeners to view the preacher as out of touch and desperate for sermon “fillers.” “Jokes are risky business,” Calvin Miller cautions. “A joke (that’s been) previously heard deflects the sermon interest away from the topic. It leaves the hearer trying to remember when he or she first heard it and how better or worse it was told on that occasion.”⁹⁷ Miller goes on to state that such jokes often seem corny and tend to trivialize truth. “Better than telling jokes,” Miller suggests, “is learning to use anecdotes and stories that have a creative lightness about them.”⁹⁸ This kind of humor, Miller contends, is truly a tension breaker and an attention grabber.

Humor which is Natural to the Preacher’s Personality

Miller also feels that a preacher’s humor should be natural. According to Miller, “nothing enhances authenticity (and sparkle) like the art of being ourselves.”⁹⁹ This is

⁹⁶ Caryl Rae Krannich, *101 Secrets of Highly Effective Speakers: Controlling Fear, Commanding Attention* (Manassas Park: Impact Publications, 1998), 64.

⁹⁷ Miller, *Marketplace Preaching*, 105.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 106.

the reason professional comedians are so successful. They have learned to tap into their natural humorous tendencies and have a style that fits their personalities.¹⁰⁰

This emphasis on the natural humor of a preacher is reiterated by Bruce Mawhinney in his book on preaching. While Mawhinney is very much in favor of using humor to improve the body of a sermon, he insists that a preacher's humor "should be natural, not canned."¹⁰¹ He further suggests that hyperbole is a far more effective and natural kind of humor for the preacher's task than canned humor.¹⁰²

David Buttrick put the need for a preacher's humor to be natural in even stronger terms. "We can state a general rule with ease," Buttrick boldly asserts. "If you are a naturally funny person, your problem will be control; if you are not a naturally funny person, do not try!"¹⁰³ According to Buttrick, the temptation for a preacher to use humor in order to be liked by his church members is exceptionally strong. Giving in to this temptation will almost always cause the laughter in the church to escalate to the point where "the profound currents of the gospel are diverted."¹⁰⁴ Thus, the preacher must use humor in a very intentional way, bringing laughter only when he wants his hearers to laugh (and for good reason) and only if the preacher is a naturally humorous person.

Humor must be natural to who the preacher is. That is the view of Dr. David Schmitt, Homiletics Professor at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. He advises his students to use humor that is natural to them –and even then to use it with discernment. "You might make a joke which seems natural," suggests Schmitt, "but it may be seen as irreverence

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 107.

¹⁰¹ Bruce Mawhinney, *Preaching with Freshness* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1997), 246.

¹⁰² Ibid., 254-255.

¹⁰³ Buttrick, *Homiletic*, 146.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 147.

by those in the congregation.”¹⁰⁵ Humor should flow naturally and easily from the speaker. “If being funny makes you self-conscious, then don’t force humor into your speech,” counsels Rudolph Verderber.¹⁰⁶

No educator, professional speaker or homiletician I encountered in my research denies the place of humor in communication, but almost all of them stress the need to be comfortable with the style of humor that you use. The style must fit the personality and character of the speaker. As Erik Thoennes has pointed out, humor can go bad quickly. “There are few things that become unedifying as quickly as humor.”¹⁰⁷ Humor must be handled carefully. Thus it is strongly advisable for a preacher of the Gospel to seek out the types of humor with which he is most comfortable, which fit his personality, and which he himself likes. He should then work at honing those types of humor for the glory of God and the edification of fellow believers. Being a preacher who desires to use all the gifts of communication that God has given us involves *developing a godly sense of humor*.

A Word of Warning

Although it seems clear that humor strengthens all three of Aristotle's means and has been used effectively in the task preaching and teaching for some time, there is a danger that humor will be used improperly. I am not talking about the danger of Lutheran pastors foisting holy laughter on their congregations, but the danger of Lutheran pastors

¹⁰⁵ Jeff Daniel, “Humor in our Lives: Laughs from the Pulpit,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, January 21, 2007, EV 1, 3.

¹⁰⁶ Verderber, *Communicate!*, 353.

¹⁰⁷ Erik Thoennes, “Laughing Through the Tears,” 73.

using humor merely to entertain. Noted homiletician Elizabeth Achtemeier expresses this concern in her book *Creative Preaching, Finding the Words*:

The preacher's style must always be *appropriate*, however. The context of preaching is worship, and we do not behave flippantly before the living God, nor do we tell jokes that have nothing to do with his reign. Some preachers wish to be funny in the pulpit just to call attention to their own sense of humor.¹⁰⁸

Most pastors, no matter who they are, want to be liked. And so there is a temptation for pastors to use humor simply to get a laugh, simply to get people to like them. Now there is nothing wrong with church members liking their pastor (I hope a few of my members like me). But if a desire to be liked is one's motivation for using humor in sermons, then the focus is wrong –the focus is on the preacher's need rather than bringing God's Word to the people. The danger is jokes and stories overshadowing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Many of us have heard speakers who told one joke after another and had their audiences in stitches. But when the speech was over, people wondered, "What was his point? What was he trying to communicate?" May that question never be asked in the church of Jesus Christ! The focus of every sermon must be Jesus Christ crucified, risen from the dead, and ruling his church in love and power.

We in the church need to be vigilant about the content of our messages and keeping those messages focused on Jesus. Neil Postman states in his book, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, that although TV evangelists don't intentionally trivialize religion, their shows become mere entertainment due to the nature of the medium. Close-ups on the speaker, talk show format, and physically attractive guests and sidekicks are a must on TV, but reduce worship to showmanship.¹⁰⁹ Postman contends that these shows are more about

¹⁰⁸ Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Creative Preaching: Finding the Right Words* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 95.

¹⁰⁹ Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), 114-124.

the speaker than about God. “On these shows, the preacher is tops. God comes out as second banana.”¹¹⁰ Our preaching is not so much about us, but about Jesus Christ. In the church, God is tops and the preacher his servant (or spokesman).

Having said all this, however, remember that humor and laughter are gifts from God. Like all of God’s gifts, they can be abused, but they can also be used for God’s glory. They are not substitutes for the Gospel, but *tools* for the Gospel, aids in proclaiming Christ to the nations.

Conclusion

As Christians we have the liberty to use humor in a God pleasing way. We know it helps capture the audience’s good will and attention. It builds rapport and eases the tension of uncomfortable situations and the difficulty of hard teachings. It helps further the feeling of unity among people who are one in faith, in hope and in doctrine. It actually relaxes people and helps them remember the points of a preacher’s message. It can focus the mind and keep it from drifting. For all these reasons and more, preachers ought to view humor as their friend and cultivate a sense of humor, albeit a style of humor that is natural to them. True, developing a sense of humor is hard work. Most preachers are not known to be overly humorous. We tend to be serious guys. But the benefits of a good sense of humor are numerous. Even if people fail to laugh at your jokes, you can find pleasure in them and laugh at them yourself! As we develop a better sense of humor, I cannot help but feel that we will experience the *joy of preaching* more and more.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 117.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROJECT

The Design of the Project

This project was designed to investigate how the use of humor in preaching helps church members listen to and understand sermons and to identify which types of humor are more effective in communicating a preacher's message. The findings of this investigation are to be used to develop guidelines for the intentional and effective use of humor in sermons.

During the theological and bibliographic research conducted for this project (presented in chapters two and three), I was able to detect some Biblical uses of humor and thus establish a precedent for the use of humor in Christian teaching. I also examined the relationship between the rhetorical device of humor and the efficacy of the Gospel delivered through the means of grace. This research led me to conclude that, while humor cannot bring about repentance and faith in Jesus Christ as the Gospel message itself can, it can be used as a tool of the Gospel, causing hearers to listen to the life changing news of Jesus' redeeming love. Faith comes from hearing the Gospel message (Rom. 10:17), but the rhetorical device of humor can be an aid in helping people listen to and understand the Gospel.

The bibliographic research I conducted also provided insights from educators, professional speakers, and homileticians on the effective and appropriate use of humor in teaching, public speaking and preaching. These insights were used to develop questionnaires designed to evaluate the retention and understanding of sermon points made with humor. These questionnaires were also designed to assess which types of humor participants liked and which made the greatest impact on them. I later used the findings of the questionnaires to develop questions for interviews conducted a few weeks after the questionnaires were completed. The interview questions were designed to affirm or clarify the data provided by the questionnaires and the bibliographic research.

The field research for the project was conducted in the context of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Waterloo, IL, where I have served as the administrative or sole pastor for thirteen years. My familiarity and close relationships with the members of Immanuel facilitated the recruitment of volunteers, who agreed to fill out questionnaires and be interviewed. The fact that I often use humor in my sermons also helped volunteers understand the purpose of my project. Church members willingly and joyfully pledged their support in putting this Major Applied Project together.

The final stage of this project's field research involved sending the first draft of the project to the members of a focus group composed of the pastors in my circuit. They were asked to read the draft carefully, paying particularly close attention to chapters 1, 2, 3, and 6 (I asked them to read chapters 4 and 5 as well, but these chapters deal with field research procedure, development and findings and I felt the amount of material might make an in depth analysis difficult). I then presented the project to the focus group during our circuit pastors' meeting on May 19, 2009. Much discussion ensued as I

explained the project's purpose, theological foundation, bibliographical research, field research, and findings. Every pastor present participated in the discussion and the topic seemed to resonate with all of them. The members of the focus group were then asked to write a reaction paper affirming what was positive and making suggestions for the improvement of the project. The deadline for the reaction papers was two weeks after the presentation.

Informing the Congregation

In March of 2008, I informed Immanuel's Church Council that I planned to ask for at least 48 congregational members to participate in the research for my Major Applied Project by filling out questionnaires. After listening to a sermon incorporating humor, twelve participants would fill out a questionnaire that asked questions about the sermon immediately after the worship service. This procedure would be followed four times, utilizing four different sermons and questionnaires and involving four groups of different volunteers. These sermons would be delivered during the services on July 12-13, 2008, August 16-17, 2008, September 13-14, 2008, and October 18-19, 2008. I also informed the Council that I would need approximately thirty volunteers from among those who filled out a questionnaire to be interviewed by me at a later date. Those interviewed would be asked for their opinions regarding humor in sermons and what effect such humor has on listeners. These interviews were to take place during November 2008, December 2008, and January 2009.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ Unfortunately, I was only able to do two interviews during November. This worked out well, however, since the two who participated found it extremely enjoyable. They told other members that the interviews were a wonderful experience and were able to alleviate some of the fears and concerns of the volunteers who were scheduled for later interviews.

After the Church Council approved the project and pledged its support in helping me complete it, I presented information about the project to all of Immanuel's members via church bulletins, a monthly newsletter, a weekly email news update, and verbal announcements made at the beginning of every worship service. Along with the request for forty-eight volunteers to fill out questionnaires, I provided a volunteer form in all the church's publications that listed the dates the sermons were to be delivered. Volunteers were asked to indicate which date they preferred for filling out questionnaires. The form also included a request for 30 volunteers from among those filling out questionnaires to participate in interviews during which they would be asked to share their views and feelings regarding humor in sermons. After about a month, I received enough volunteer pledges to complete all the questionnaires and interviews (I did recruit a small number of volunteers to ensure that a broad spectrum of Immanuel members would be involved in the process).

After contacting the volunteers about five days before they were to fill out the questionnaires, twelve participants filled out questionnaires after the worship services on July 12-13, 2008. I repeated the process of contacting volunteers about five days before they were to fill out their questionnaires three times. I had thirteen participants fill out questionnaires after the worship services on August 16-17, 2008. Fifteen participants filled out questionnaires after the worship services held on September 13-14, 2008, and twelve filled out questionnaires after the services held on October 18-19, 2008.

The Questionnaires

The questionnaires were designed to gauge the respondents' understanding of and retention of sermon points made with humor and to obtain their general impressions about the use of certain types of humor in sermons. All the questionnaires and the sermons upon which they are based can be found in the Appendices of this Major Applied Project.

Different questionnaires sometimes covered the same type of humor. For example, questionnaires one and four asked about impressions regarding self-deprecating humor and questionnaire three asked participants to react to a personal story told by the preacher that was humorous and slightly self-deprecating. Furthermore, even though "imported" jokes (jokes that are not related to the sermon topic) were not used, participants were asked to react to the use of imported jokes in questionnaires one, two, and three. The types of humor covered in the questionnaires and the rationales for including them are as follows.

Questionnaire number one, completed on July 12-13, 2008. Because I often use self-deprecating humor in my sermons and because my theoretical research indicated that this type of humor is helpful in grabbing the hearer's attention, establishing rapport with the hearer,¹¹² and making the speaker seem more genuine,¹¹³ I included some self-deprecating humor in my sermon.¹¹⁴ After explaining what self-deprecating humor is, questionnaire number one asked the participants if they detected any self-deprecating

¹¹² See 34-35, 51 of this MAP.

¹¹³ See 52-53 of this MAP.

¹¹⁴ Appendix A, 1-6. I used Dr. Reed Lessing's sermon series on The Ten Commandments as a resource.

humor in the sermon. They were also asked to describe how it was used in the sermon and what kind of impressions it made on them.

Since puns, plays on words, and silly names are sometimes recommended as useful communication tools,¹¹⁵ I also included some examples of these types of humor in the sermon that served as the basis of questionnaire number one. Participants were asked to describe any puns or silly names that they encountered in the preaching that day and whether they found these puns or silly names engaging or distracting.

My theoretical research also indicated that unexpected contrasts and incongruity are at the very heart of what people find humorous. “From clowns and stand-up comedians to the most erudite wits,” insists homiletician Warren Wiersbe, “humorists depend on *unexpected contrasts* (his italics).”¹¹⁶ This idea is affirmed by psychologist Norman Holland in his book *Laughing: A Psychology of Humor*. According to Holland, every theory developed to explain what makes people laugh begins with the idea of incongruity.¹¹⁷ “As early as the sixteenth century,” Holland asserts, “people began to point to suddenness, unexpectedness, and (particularly) surprise as indispensable prerequisites to laughter.”¹¹⁸ This would explain why old jokes don’t amuse people. The “punch” of an old joke is neutralized by the lack of surprise.¹¹⁹

Based on the recommendation of these and other authors, I attempted to include some unexpected twists and humorous contrasts in the sermon that served as the basis of

¹¹⁵ John Drakeford devotes a good portion of chapter five in *Humor in Preaching* to puns and word plays. Educators like Elaine Lundberg, Cheryl Thurston, Diana Loomans and Karen Kolberg encourage the use of puns and silly names.

¹¹⁶ Warren Wiersbe, *Preaching and Teaching with Imagination* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1994), 273.

¹¹⁷ Norman Holland, *Laughing: A Psychology of Humor* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 21.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 32.

questionnaire number one. The questionnaire asked respondents if they noticed any unexpected twists or surprises and to describe them if they did.

Finally, participants were asked what they remembered most about the sermon. My intention for this question was to see if they understood the theme of the sermon and whether humor had been an aid in the comprehension of sermon points. The questionnaire also asked respondents whether humor had enhanced or detracted from the message of the sermon.

Questionnaire number two, completed on August 16-17, 2008. Since physical humor is advocated by some educators,¹²⁰ I engaged in a bit of physical humor (I went down the aisle, made my hand look like a gun, pointed it at a member and said, “Stick ‘em up!”) at the beginning of my sermon¹²¹. Questionnaire number two asked respondents if they noticed any physical humor and to describe it if they had. They were also asked what point was made with this type of humor and how comfortable they were with it.

As was touched upon in Chapter Two of this Major Applied Project, hyperbole (usually called exaggeration) is quite evident in Scripture. After citing several examples of Biblical hyperbole in his book, *Preaching with Freshness*, author Bruce Mawhinney concludes that hyperbole is a very appropriate type of humor for the task of preaching. This type of humor, Mawhinney contends, is natural, engaging, and makes a point in

¹²⁰ Teachers of young children will often use silly buttons, stickers and dress-up to add humor to the classroom. In *If They're Laughing They Just Might Be Listening*, authors Elaine Lundberg and Cheryl Thurston recommend having a “Grubby Day,” a “Fifties Day,” and a “Dress Backwards Day,” 29.

¹²¹ Appendix A, 7. The whole sermon is found on 7-13. I used Dr. Reed Lessing’s sermon series on The Ten Commandments as a resource.

memorable fashion.¹²² In light of this, I decided to include a number of humorous exaggerations in the sermon that served as the basis of questionnaire number two. Respondents were asked to describe any humorous exaggerations they noticed and whether these exaggerations distracted or engaged them.

Because humorous anecdotes are considered by most experts to be a greater communication tool than “imported” jokes or canned humor,¹²³ I included a number of humorous anecdotes in my sermon that related very directly to the sermon topic. Participants were then asked to describe any anecdotes they remembered and to relate the point that was made by using them. They were further asked how the anecdotes affected them.

Questionnaire number two also included questions about imported jokes and what the respondents remembered most about the sermon.

Questionnaire number three, completed on September 13-14, 2008. The sermon¹²⁴ that served as the basis of questionnaire number three dealt with the topic of revenge and forgiveness. Since I find this a very serious and emotional topic, I believe the humor in this sermon was a bit more forced than in other sermons. However, I did manage to introduce one new kind of humor, namely, a serious story with a humorous twist at the end.

Questionnaire number three began with questions regarding humorous sounding

¹²² Bruce Mawhinney, *Preaching with Freshness* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1997), 246, 254-255.

¹²³ See 54-55 of this MAP.

¹²⁴ Appendix A, 14-20.

websites that can be found on the internet. However, even though the names of these websites sound humorous, they deal with the dark subject of taking revenge on people who wrong you.

This sermon also included a very personal, very humorous story about a childhood experience which I used to make a point about the fear that the brothers of the Old Testament patriarch Joseph must have felt when they learned that Joseph was alive. You will recall that they treated him shamefully by selling him into slavery. When they learned many years later that he was alive and was second in command in Egypt, they feared that he would take revenge on them. In this sermon, I shared a personal experience with fear and compared it to that of the brothers.

Participants were again asked to react to the use of imported jokes in sermons and what they remembered most about the sermon.

Questionnaire number four, completed on October 18-19, 2008. Wishing to evaluate participants' reactions to plays on words and puns, I began the sermon¹²⁵ upon which questionnaire four is based by relating a humorous *Mountain Dew* commercial to my listeners. The theme for this commercial (indeed, for all of this company's advertisements) is "Do the Dew." Since the theme for the sermon was giving the government its due and God his due, I created a play on words by changing the soft drink slogan to "Do the Due," which also served as a chorus throughout the sermon. Participants were asked to react to both the commercial and the play on words.

¹²⁵ Appendix A, 21-27.

I also used some self-deprecating humor in the sermon and asked the respondents if it lowered or raised their opinion of the preacher. Respondents were further asked whether they felt that there were dangers involved in using self-deprecating humor.¹²⁶

Wishing to again evaluate whether humorous stories grab people's attention and help them remember sermon points, I used a humorous story that related very directly to my point in the middle of the sermon. Questionnaire number four asked respondents if they remembered this story. If so, they were to describe the story and the point that was made by using it.

Finally, participants were asked whether they remembered anything else that was humorous in the sermon, what they remembered most about the message, and what in the message was most meaningful to them.

The Interviews

By the end of October 2008, all the questionnaires had been completed and the data summarized. The data was then evaluated and used to formulate interview questions. These questions, which were to be used in the interviews I would conduct with thirty volunteers during the months of November, December, and January, were designed to test the findings of the data provided by the questionnaires or to clarify the findings when the data was nebulous or incomplete. While many responses in the questionnaires clearly affirmed the data collected from my theoretical research, some of the responses seemed to contradict the research or circumvent it, making some conclusions risky. Additionally, some of the responses to certain types of humor surprised me because of my personal

¹²⁶ Covered on 53-54 of this MAP.

bias against these types of humor. I therefore determined to take a closer look at these types of humor and examine how they affected respondents. More specifically, I wanted to learn more about why the respondents liked the types of humor that I personally dislike.

The interviews took place in my office or the respondent's home and lasted anywhere from twenty-five minutes to forty-five minutes. I conducted thirty interviews. At the beginning of each interview, I assured the respondent that his/her answers were confidential and that there were no right or wrong answers. I encouraged them to speak freely and candidly. I also indicated that the interviews would probably be easier to complete than the questionnaires because I would be able to explain questions more thoroughly. Further, they would be able to ask me questions. Most of respondents were relaxed and almost all of them found the interview to be a pleasant and enlightening experience.

The first question was quite open-ended, asking respondents how they felt about preachers using humor in sermons. They were then asked about the frequency of humor in the sermons at Immanuel –whether they thought there ought to be more, less, or about the same amount of humor in the sermons delivered at Immanuel. Because my theoretical research and the responses of the questionnaires indicated that there are some significant benefits to using self-deprecating humor in sermons, I wanted to affirm this finding through the interview process. Thus, I asked the respondents if they noticed their pastors using self-deprecating humor in their sermons. They were then asked how this type of humor made them feel about their pastors and if they perceived any dangers in using it.

When I decided to introduce physical humor in my second sermon and asked participants to respond to it in the second questionnaire, I did not expect many positive responses. However, to my surprise, all the respondents remembered the physical humor and seemed to enjoy it. They were also able to articulate the point I made using the physical humor quite well. Because I consider physical humor to be a lowbrow kind of comedy and because I consider it difficult to use in serious settings, I wanted to further examine attitudes toward this kind of comedy. Since my example of physical humor occurred early in the sermon and because it is so unusual in serious speeches, I wondered whether these factors contributed to its positive reception. Needing more information on the topic, question number three in the interview asked respondents if they felt physical humor is appropriate in preaching and how comfortable they are with it. They were also asked to think of some examples of physical humor that might be inappropriate in preaching.

Question number four in the interview asked respondents whether they believe humor in sermons helps them remember sermon points. If they answered affirmatively, they were also asked why they think humor helps them remember sermon points.

Because puns or plays on words in sermons have never impressed me personally, I anticipated that most people would not care for this kind of humor. I consider most puns to be corny and uninteresting, and I assumed that most people feel the same way. However, the responses from the questionnaires indicated that puns, plays on words, and silly names were viewed more favorably than I realized. There was also evidence that suggested that this type of humor engages listeners. Therefore, question number five in the interview asked how puns, plays on words and silly names affect the interviewee.

Suggested responses included “they cause me to listen more carefully,” “they cause me to groan inwardly,” and “they cause me to scratch my head in confusion.”

Question number six in the interview asked respondents if they remembered humorous exaggerations in sermons and whether they believed most people noticed exaggerations in preaching. They were also asked about the benefits and drawbacks of using exaggerations in preaching. This was done because a number of the respondents to the questionnaires did not pick up on the exaggerations in my sermons that I found most humorous. While these respondents noticed exaggerations, they did not mention the ones that I thought were most obvious. Thus, I felt that more data and clarification were needed on the effects of exaggerations on the hearer.

Question number seven in the interview asked respondents how helpful they thought “imported” jokes are in a sermon. They were also asked how they feel in general about imported jokes. These questions were designed to affirm what some of the questionnaires and my theoretical research indicated about imported jokes, namely, that they are not very engaging and may actually distract listeners from the real point of the sermon or speech.

Before I asked the last question in the interview, I shared information about the power of stories with the interviewees. Part of this involved explaining to them that people generally relate well to stories, especially when the stories evoke strong emotions. I then asked the interviewees to offer an opinion about serious and humorous stories, specifically, whether sermon points are communicated more effectively by using serious stories or by using humorous stories. This question was designed to discover whether the power of stories depends on the stories’ serious content and tone. Since effective

stories in sermons tend to be quite serious, I wanted to see if humorous stories have the same impact.

The Focus Group

After writing the first draft of this project, I sent copies of it to the pastors of my focus group (the pastors of my circuit). After delivering a presentation of this MAP to the focus group on May 19, 2009, during which I explained the findings of my research and the guidelines developed from the findings, I asked the pastors to reflect on the material presented. They were then asked to write a reaction paper on the project, either affirming the findings or calling them into question based on their own experiences and study.

These papers were to be sent to me no later than two weeks after the initial presentation.

The pastors who sent reactions papers to me were Rev. Matthew Clark, Immanuel Lutheran Church, Waterloo, IL; Rev. Michael Kumm, Trinity Lutheran Church, Millstadt, IL; Rev. Bruce Keseman, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Freeburg, IL; Rev. Stuart Rethwisch, Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Wartburg, IL, and Rev. Steven Theiss, St. Paul Luthreran Church, Columbia, IL.¹²⁷

Special attention was given to the group's reactions, particularly their assessments of the guidelines regarding the appropriate and inappropriate uses of humor in preaching. Their feedback was then included in the final draft of this Major Applied Project.

¹²⁷ These reaction papers are found in Appendix F, 87-102.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE PROJECT EVALUATED

Field Research Data

The field research for this project involved three distinct phases: the sermon questionnaires, the interviews, and the reaction papers of the focus group. The data from each phase will therefore be presented in a descriptive format and then analyzed in the light of the purpose of this project and the information obtained from the theoretical research already presented.

Sermon Questionnaire Results

Four different questionnaires testing four different sermons were administered over a period of four months, the administration of each questionnaire being separated by approximately four weeks time. Twelve respondents completed the questionnaire presented on July 12-13, 2009; thirteen respondents completed the questionnaires present on August 16-17, 2008; fifteen respondents completed the questionnaire presented on September 13-14, 2008; and twelve respondents completed the questionnaire presented on October 18-19, 2008. A total of fifty-two questionnaires were completed.

Questionnaire Number One,¹²⁸ July 12-13, 2008, Twelve Respondents

The First Set of Questions

When asked whether the respondents noticed any self-deprecating humor in the sermon, eleven (92 %) answered “yes” and one (8 %) answered “no.”

When asked how the self-deprecating humor was used and how it related to the topic, eleven respondents (100 % of those who responded –one participant did not answer the question) cited an appropriate example of self-deprecating humor and eleven (100 % of those who responded –one participant did not answer the question) were able to articulate the point that was made using this kind of humor. Some of the comments which describe the self-deprecating humor used in the sermon include:

- Your example of Tony Bologna or Tony Macaroni was funny. It brought to mind just how offensive it is to God to have His name used so irrationally.
- Pastor described being called Tony Bologna and Tony Macaroni. God’s name is precious and shouldn’t be used in vain.
- In using his name in funny and annoying ways showing us how God doesn’t like it when we use His name other than calling upon Him in prayer.

When asked how comfortable they were with self-deprecating humor in sermons, eight participants (73 %) responded very positively, two responses (18 %) were neutral, and one (9 %) was negative. Some of the positive responses included:

¹²⁸ Appendix B, 28-31. The responses are found in Appendix C, 44-49.

- Yes, it relaxes us and puts us in a more receptive mood.
- Yes, it shows a personal side of the pastor and helps the congregation relate to his experience.
- Yes, it is useful in holding the attention of the younger as well as the older people in the congregation.

More negative comments included:

- Usually, if it is kept light-hearted.
- People are not always sure how to take a person or how to respond when people use self-deprecating humor.

When asked whether they felt self-deprecating humor in sermons is engaging, nine participants (75 %) responded positively, two responses (17 %) were neutral, and one response (8 %) was slightly negative.

When asked whether they felt self-deprecating humor is useful in making sermon points and how it affects their impression of the speaker, eleven participants (92 %) indicated that this kind of humor is engaging and one (8%) indicated that it is engaging if it isn't used too often.¹²⁹ Eight participants (89 %) indicated that self-deprecating humor improves their impression of the speaker and one (11 %) indicated that it would lower his/her opinion of the speaker if the speaker used this kind of humor too often.¹³⁰

Analysis of the First Set of Questions in Questionnaire Number One

The results from this set of questions strongly indicate that the participants in this survey find self-deprecating humor engaging and that it is useful in making sermon points. A few respondents find this kind of humor hard to understand and one indicated a

¹²⁹ I consider this a neutral to positive response. Overuse of any kind of humor should be avoided.

¹³⁰ This response is somewhat neutral.

preference for a light-hearted approach to it. The results further indicate that, used in moderation, the preacher's use of self-deprecating humor would not lower congregational members' opinion of him and may actually create a helpful rapport with him. This coincides with many of the findings uncovered by the theoretical research undertaken for this project.

The results also suggest that care should be taken not to overuse self-deprecating humor since its overuse may be interpreted as a lack of confidence. I suspect that some of the respondents were concerned that the preacher might become too insulting in his comments and would thus degrade the Office of the Pastoral Ministry. All this corresponds with the project's theoretical research.

The Second Set of Questions

When asked whether the respondents detected any examples of puns or silly names in the sermon, eleven (92 %) indicated that they had and one respondent (8 %) did not notice any puns or silly names. When asked how the puns and silly names related to the sermon topic, eleven respondents (100 % of those who noticed puns or silly names) were able to articulate how they were used to make a point. Some of their comments include:

- Yes, when you related that they called you Tony Bologna and using names about God in vain, such as cursing and swearing.
- Yes. Dan Druff, etc. It shows how a name can affect people's reaction to the person.
- Yes. Call us by our right name, it is important.

When asked whether the participants found puns or silly names engaging or distracting in sermons, nine (82 %) found them engaging, one (9 %) had no opinion, and one (9 %) simply said “no.” Some of the remarks of those who found them engaging include:

- I find it engaging. It helps bring reality to the sermon. It makes it more personal.
- They are usually funny. I like puns (as long as I understand them and it relates to the point).

Analysis of the Second Set of Questions for Questionnaire Number One

To my surprise,¹³¹ the results of the second set of questions indicate that puns and silly names are generally engaging to and liked by the participants in this survey.

Furthermore, the participants do remember the points made with them. Some of the responses suggest that the overuse of puns and puns unrelated to the sermon would become a distraction.¹³²

Unexpected Twists and Contrasts Question

When asked whether they noticed any unexpected twists or contrasts in a humorous story told in the sermon, only two respondents (18 %) mentioned the twist that I intended as an example of an unexpected twist. Five respondents (46 %) did not notice any unexpected twists and four respondents (36 %) mentioned humorous elements in the sermon that were not unexpected twists.

¹³¹ Puns are not my favorite form of humor and I did not find much information about them in my research.

¹³² As one respondent put it, puns should be understandable and relate to the sermon topic.

Analysis of the Unexpected Twists and Contrasts Question in Questionnaire Number One

The results of this question indicate that my humorous story was not as humorous as I thought,¹³³ or the twist was too subtle, or too much time had elapsed between the hearing of the sermon and filling out the questionnaires.

The Third Set of Questions

When asked what they remembered most about the sermon, ten respondents (91 %) articulated the sermon theme (or themes) very clearly. Some of the responses include:

- Always be vigilant of how we use God's name. Always to His glory.
- The importance of using the Lord's name as intended, not in cursing or nonsensical ways.
- I thought the sermon made a very good point of helping us understand how we might feel if our names were used abusively. Then transferring that to how God feels when we use his name.

One respondent's (9 %) answer was so vague that I could not determine whether it related to the sermon topic or not.

When asked whether they felt that the use of humor in the sermon helped them remember the points the pastor was making, eleven participants (92 %) responded positively and one (8 %) indicated that he remembered the sermon points because the sermon was about the Second Commandment.

¹³³ I told the story of an older couple who went to their pastor for marital counseling. After talking about their marriage for a while, the pastor suggested that they pray. The husband looked very concerned and said, "Pastor, do you think it's come to that?"

When asked whether the humor in the sermon enhanced or distracted them from the message of the sermon, twelve respondents (100 %) indicated that the humor enhanced the message. Some of the responses include:

- I think it enhanced it because it made people more relaxed and open to the Word.
- Enhanced by drawing attention to the topic in a clear fashion.
- I think it made the point that we should be mindful of names and how they make someone feel good or bad. This illustrates how we should regard God and the care with which we should address Him.

Analysis of the Third Set of Questions in Questionnaire Number One

The results of the third set of questions indicate that humor helps the participants in this survey remember sermon points. The results also indicate that the participants accept and desire a certain amount of humor in the sermons delivered by their pastors. In fact, they seem enthusiastic about their pastors' use of humor in sermons and view this humor as an aid to understanding sermons.

Questionnaire Number Two,¹³⁴ August 16-17, 2008, Thirteen

Respondents

The First Set of Questions

When asked whether they detected any physical humor in the sermon, thirteen respondents (100 %) indicated that they had. When asked to describe the example of physical humor, thirteen respondents (100 %) were able to describe it accurately. Most

¹³⁴ Appendix B, 32-35. The responses are found in Appendix C, 49-55.

respondents repeated the exact phrase used in the demonstration of physical humor:

“Stick ‘em up!”

When asked to describe the point the preacher was making by using physical humor, six respondents (46 %) described it in a general way and seven respondents (54 %) described it quite accurately. Some of the comments of those who described the point accurately include:

- This type of stealing is not the only way we steal.
- Examples of things just as damaging as physical burglary with a gun...We steal when we cheat people.
- To describe possibly the most overt concept of stealing.

When asked whether they were comfortable with physical humor in sermons, twelve participants (92 %) responded positively and one (8 %) indicated that it was acceptable if it was not “too outrageous.” Some of the comments include:

- Yes. It adds another dimension to the sermon.
- Yes. Any movement keeps people alert.
- Yes. I find it engaging and down to earth.

Analysis of the First Set of Questions in Questionnaire Number Two

The results of this first set of questions strongly indicate that, while physical humor is unusual in sermons, it is generally accepted by the participants in this survey and can be used to make sermon points. It also seems to generate a high degree of excitement among the participants. The results indicate that people are far more comfortable with

physical humor in sermons than I imagined.¹³⁵ There seems to be a significant amount of receptivity to yoking “flesh and blood” images with the spoken Word.

The Second Set of Questions

When asked whether the participants noticed any humorous exaggerations in the sermon and to describe them if they had, two respondents (16 %) indicated that they did not notice any exaggerations, seven (59 %) described humorous exaggerations, and three (25 %) described humorous elements that were not exaggerations.

When asked to describe how the exaggerations related to the sermon topic, one respondent (9 %) stated that he could not remember how they related, eight (73 %) were able to explain how the exaggerations related to the sermon topic, and two (18 %) described points that were made with other types of humor.

When asked whether humorous exaggerations distract or engage people as they listen to a sermon, eleven (85 %) respondents indicated that they engage, one (7.5 %) said that they distract, and one (7.5 %) simply said “no.” The respondent who finds exaggerations distracting wrote: “It makes me wonder what would need to happen to make the exaggeration truthful.”

Analysis of the Second Set of Questions for Questionnaire Number Two

The results from this set of questions indicate that the participants in this survey like humorous exaggerations and find them engaging. Generally, they remember and understand the points made by using exaggerations. However, some results seem to

¹³⁵ I suspect that this acceptance is partly due to the fact that my example of physical humor was not too outrageous. I also suspect that this example of humor was remembered because it occurred at the beginning of the sermon and I walked down the aisle (not my usual custom) to engage in it.

indicate that members do not always perceive exaggerations as exaggerations and sometimes misunderstand them. Furthermore, I suspect that because exaggerations are often used in everyday language, many exaggerations go unnoticed. An exaggeration that is used too often lacks the element of surprise –and so fails to be humorous.¹³⁶

Third Set of Questions

When asked if they noticed any humorous anecdotes in the sermon and to describe them if they did, eight respondents (89 %) described appropriate anecdotes and one (11 %) listed four humorous elements in the sermon only one of which was an anecdote. The majority of respondents remembered an anecdote about a tax cheat who, feeling remorse for his crime, sent the IRS a \$500 check. His letter to the IRS read, “I wasn’t real honest about my tax return, so here’s \$500.” Then he wrote at the bottom, “P. S. If I still feel guilty, I’ll send the rest later.”

When asked to describe the points the preacher was making by telling the anecdotes, five (56 %) described the points in a general way, three (33 %) described the points with significant accuracy, and one response (11 %) was too vague to connect it to any of the points made with the anecdotes.

When asked how the preacher’s use of anecdotes affected them, ten (100 % of those responding) participants responded positively. Most indicated that the anecdotes helped them remember and understand the sermon. Some of the responses include:

- The anecdotes help me relate the message to my life. They keep my attention focused on the sermon. They relax and encourage listening.

¹³⁶ Norman Holland suggests that old jokes fail to make people laugh because they lack surprise. See 67 of this MAP.

- I really enjoyed them. It helped me understand things better.
- Always be honest!
- Things to consider about what stealing really means, obvious and subtle.

Analysis of the Third Set of Questions in Questionnaire Number Two

The results of the third set of questions indicate that the participants in this survey find humorous anecdotes engaging and helpful in understanding sermon points. It also appears that some of the participants had difficulty distinguishing between humorous anecdotes and other types of humor. This is understandable, however, given the complexity of distinguishing between different kinds of humor and the difficulty of filling out a questionnaire regarding a sermon heard twenty to thirty minutes prior. Most responses indicate that people just like a good story and can relate to them easily.

The Fourth Set of Questions

When asked how helpful they thought “imported” jokes (jokes that do not relate to the sermon topic) might be in a sermon, two participants (17 %) responded that they were clearly helpful, seven responses (58 %) were neutral, and three responses (25 %) indicated that they were not helpful. Some of the comments of those who find imported jokes helpful include:

- They get people “warmed up.”
- A way to get attention and bring the sermon more “down to earth.”
- Tough question. A joke would likely liven the crowd, but that’s the only way it might be helpful.

When asked how they felt about imported jokes in general, two responses (15 %) were very positive, six (46 %) were neutral, and five (39 %) were negative. Some of the comments include:

- Good ice breakers with some audiences/meetings.
- That they are distracting. If they relate to the sermon, they put us on the right track. If not, it gets us unfocused.
- An imported joke may be appropriate to begin a sermon, but if doesn't help to convey the message, then it is distracting and unhelpful.
- Only needed when the conversation is slowing.
- Be careful. Occasional imported jokes can relax and prepare people for the start of a meeting or sermon, but in general I feel they are “cheap” and lend no sustenance to the material.

Analysis of the Fourth Set of Questions in Questionnaire Number Two

The results of the fourth set of questions seems to indicate that the participants in this survey would be comfortable with an imported joke as an “opener,” but that these kind of jokes should be used in moderation. Some respondents view imported jokes as cheap and distracting. The results of this set of questions do not correspond completely with the findings of the theoretical research done for this project (experts suggest that imported jokes are overdone, distracting to the topic point, and may backfire if the joke is too old), so this topic will be revisited in other questionnaires.

The Final Question

When asked what the respondents remembered most about the sermon, nine (75 %) articulated sermon themes and indicated that humor had made the themes more meaningful and understandable. Two participants (17 %) wrote about examples of humor that they had encountered, and one response (8 %) was too vague to connect it to any sermon point.

Analysis of the Final Question in Questionnaire Number Two

The results of this question indicate that humor grabs the attention of the participants in this survey and helps them comprehend sermon points. It also seems that humor in sermons serves as an aid to memory and is accepted and desired by many of the respondents.

Questionnaire Number Three,¹³⁷ September 13-14, 2008, Fifteen Respondents

The First Set of Questions

When asked whether they noticed several funny sounding websites mentioned in the sermon, fifteen (100 %) answered affirmatively. When asked how these websites related to the sermon, fifteen respondents (100 %) were able to accurately articulate how the websites related to the topic of revenge.

When asked how they felt about the mention of these websites (they were websites

¹³⁷ Appendix B, 36-39. The responses are found in Appendix C, 55-60.

that teach people how to take revenge on others), thirteen (87 %) found it engaging, one response (6.5 %) was neutral (“So-so,” wrote the respondent), and one (6.5 %) found their mention or their existence disgusting. Some of the comments included:

- It shows me that we are sinful and it is human not to forgive. We need to learn to forgive.
- They were good examples of how we treat our neighbor who does evil to us. It engaged me.
- It was interesting to hear about the websites, yet scary.

Analysis of the First Set of Questions in Questionnaire Number Three

The results of this set of questions indicate that participants in this survey were amused at the funny sounding names of the websites, but were shocked over their content. This mixture of humor and shock was engaging, but also a little disturbing. Most saw the point of the website clearly –“we are sinful and it is human not to forgive.” Empowered by Christ’s forgiveness, God’s people “need to learn to forgive.”

Second Set of Questions

When asked whether they noticed a humorous twist at the end of a serious anecdote, only two respondents (14 %) were able to identify the twist that was intended.¹³⁸ Twelve (86 %) respondents identified other anecdotes in the sermon that had less pronounced twists.

When asked whether they felt the humorous twist in the anecdote added to or

¹³⁸ I told an anecdote about a woman who got into a fight with her friend at a barbecue. The woman left the barbecue and vandalized her friend’s car. The humorous twist involved my remarks at the end of the story: “I’m thinking, ‘Lady, if you don’t want pickles on your hamburger, just say so. Don’t wreck your friend’s car!’”

detracted from the sermon, thirteen respondents (93%) indicated that it added to the sermon and one (7 %) did not care for the twist.

Analysis of the Second Set of Questions in Questionnaire Number Three

The results of this set of questions seem to indicate that the participants in this survey enjoy humorous anecdotes and feel they enhance the sermon. They also indicate that the humorous twist I intended was probably too subtle (although I found it hilarious).

The Third Set of Questions

When asked if they remembered a humorous story told about my childhood, fifteen respondents (100 %) indicated that they did. When asked to describe the story, fifteen respondents (100 %) described it accurately. The story had to do with being frightened by the scary scenes in *The Wizard of Oz* when watching the movie as a child. I was especially frightened by the scene of the flying monkeys. Many respondents remembered my personal story in great detail and shared some of their own feelings about the experience of watching *The Wizard of Oz*. Some of these comments include:

- He, like me, was afraid of *The Wizard of Oz*. I also hated seeing the flying monkeys, used to hide my face in (the) pillow until the scene was over.
- Watching *The Wizard of Oz* every year on TV. Some scenes were scary for a seven-year-old –the poison poppies, the woods, the flying monkeys (almost swallowed his gum). Mine was *King Kong*!
- *The Wizard of Oz* and the scary scenes –the poppies, the haunted woods, and the monkeys! (The monkeys scare everyone –even me at 33!)

When asked to describe the point the speaker was trying to make with the personal story, eight respondents (62 %) described the subject of the story in a very general way, four (30.5 %) were able to articulate the point very accurately, and one (7.5 %) indicated that he/she did not remember the point. Generally, the respondents were not able to catch the specific point of the story.

When asked whether the participants could relate to the speaker's personal, humorous story, twelve (92 %) responded positively and described how they related to it. One respondent (8 %) indicated that he/she could not relate to the story.

Analysis of the Third Set of Questions in Questionnaire Number Three

The results of this set of questions indicate that the participants in this survey listen attentively to personal, humorous stories and identify with them very readily. Some of the results seem to suggest that the point of my story may have been lost because the story was too vivid or comical. I suspect that this story built rapport with the hearers, but may not been helpful in building their understanding of the sermon theme.

Question Four

When asked whether the participants remembered anything else humorous in the sermon, four indicated that they did not remember anything else, seven mentioned several

humorous anecdotes, and two mentioned that they enjoyed it when the lights went out.¹³⁹

The Analysis of Question Four in Questionnaire Number Three

The results of this question indicate that humor makes an impression on the participants in this survey and that they are open about discussing the humorous elements in sermons. Humorous elements in sermons seem to generate interest and enthusiasm.

Question Five

After defining “imported” jokes for the respondents, they were asked how helpful they thought imported jokes might be in a sermon. Six participants (43 %) responded positively to imported jokes, two (14 %) responded negatively, four responses (29 %) were neutral, two (14 %) indicated that they might be helpful as openers, and one response was invalid. Some of the remarks included:

- I think it is good to have humor. It “wakes up” the sermon and makes me listen harder for the next possible line.
- I don’t think we need them (imported jokes).

¹³⁹ The church lost electricity during the early service on September 14, 2008, and I had to preach in the dark. Most of the members thoroughly enjoyed this since I simply paused, waited, and resumed preaching. They were impressed that I wasn’t rattled by the loss of light.

- Starting a sermon with an imported joke can engage the congregation, and they may pay closer attention.
- Laughter is good any time.

Analysis of Question Five in Questionnaire Number Three

The results of this question indicate that people like humor in sermons even if it does not relate to the sermon topic. However, there are some indications that suggest that some of the respondents may not have understood that this kind of humor does not relate to the subject (for example, one respondent wrote, “It’s very helpful. With humor people listen better and *get engaged in the subject*”).

Question Six

When asked what they remembered most about the sermon, fifteen (100 %) respondents repeated the theme of the sermon (forgiveness) –although one of the fifteen also indicated that he/she liked it when the lights went out and I kept preaching.

Analysis of Question Six of Questionnaire Number Three

The results of this question indicate that humor can be used to drive home the theme of a sermon even when the theme is something as serious as forgiving others through the power of Christ’s love and forgiveness.

Questionnaire Number Four,¹⁴⁰ October 18-19, 2008, Twelve Respondents

The First Set of Questions

The participants were asked to describe the play on words on the *Mountain Dew* slogan (“Do the Dew” was changed to “Do the Due.”) in the sermon. Twelve respondents (100 %) were able to describe the play on words accurately.

When asked how the play on words made them feel, eleven respondents (92 %) found it engaging and thought provoking and one respondent (8 %) found it difficult to understand the connection between the play on words and the theme of the sermon.

Some comments included:

- Pulls you in and sets up the sermon.
- It made me think. It was funny, and I found it engaging not distracting.
- I enjoyed the fitting together of a popular phrase into how we should be toward God. It was definitely engaging.

When asked how the respondents felt about puns and plays on words in sermons, eleven responses (92 %) were positive and one response (8 %) was neutral. Some of the remarks included:

- I believe that puns and plays on words help people relate to the lesson in play to their lives more readily.
- I like it. Helps me recall important pieces of the sermon through the work week.

¹⁴⁰ Appendix B, 40-43. The responses are found in Appendix C, 61-66.

- I think it helps to grab wandering minds back on track and listening intently increases.

Analysis of the First Set of Questions in Questionnaire Number Four

The results of this set of questions indicate that the participants in this survey enjoy puns and plays on words and find them engaging. Further, many of them feel that this kind of humor is creative and thought provoking. One respondent indicated that this type of humor helps him/her remember sermon points throughout the week. Respondents seem to want something that will help them pay attention to and remember God's Word, and most believe that puns and plays on words do just that.

The Second Set of Questions

When asked to describe an example of self-deprecating humor used by the preacher, nine respondents (75 %) identified it correctly, two (17 %) stated that they did not remember the example, and one (8 %) did not identify it correctly.

When asked whether the preacher's use of self-deprecating humor lowered their opinion of him, raised their opinion of him, or kept their opinion of him the same, two respondents (20 %) indicated that it raised their opinion of him, eight (80 %) indicated that it kept their opinion of him the same, and one response was invalid. When asked to explain the effect this kind of humor has on them, most suggested that this kind of humor makes the pastor seem more human and approachable. Some of the comments included:

- Better to be humble than proud. O. K. to use.
- I believe we can all appreciate ourselves more when we can make fun of ourselves.

- I believe the humor just reminds us that he is human just like us.

When asked whether they thought self-deprecating humor is helpful in sermons and whether it can be overdone, ten respondents (83 %) indicated that it was helpful, but can be overdone and two (17 %) indicated that it was helpful, but unlikely to be overdone.

Some remarks included:

- It makes the pastor more human... However, it can be overdone and you start to lose respect.
- It is helpful. It possibly could be overdone if you lose sight of the purpose of it as it pertains to the sermon.
- It makes the pastor be believable as a “regular” person.

Analysis of the Second Set of Questions in Questionnaire Number Four

The results of this set of questions indicate that the participants in this survey are open to their preachers’ use of self-deprecating humor and that it does not change their opinion of them. For most, this kind of humor makes the pastor seem more genuine and approachable. Although the respondents understand the danger of overusing self-deprecating humor, most feel it is unlikely to be overused by Immanuel’s pastors.

The Third Set of Questions

When asked to describe a humorous story about a scientist and a Lutheran pastor, ten respondents (83 %) described the story accurately, one (8.5 %) described a different story, and one (8.5 %) did not remember the story. The story told of a scientist who approached a Lutheran pastor and said, “I don’t want you to talk about God anymore. I

don't want you to mention him at all because science has progressed to the point where we can do anything God ever did. We can clone a man!"

"Alright," the pastor said, "let's see you make a man."

The scientist bent down to pick up a handful of dirt, but the pastor touched his arm to restrain him.

"Not so fast," the pastor said. "Use your own dirt."

When asked to explain the point of the story and whether the story reinforced the preacher's point, ten respondents (83 %) were able to explain the point, one (8.5 %) explained the point of a different story, and one (8.5%) reiterated the theme of the day. Six respondents indicated that the story reinforced the preacher's point. Some comments included:

- God created everything, and you don't have that power.
- Everything is made by God. Yes, it helped reinforce the point.
- God made everything and everything is God's.
- If we think we can go off on our own, we are going to fail.

Analysis of the Third Set of Questions in Questionnaire Number Four

The results of this set of questions indicate that sermon points made with humorous stories are remembered and reinforce the points. A noticeable amount of pleasure was generated by this story perhaps because it reinforced the teaching that God is the creator of everything in a surprising way and demonstrated that those who believe in a Creator God are not intellectually inferior.

Question Four

When asked whether they remembered any other humorous elements in the sermon and to describe them if they did, six respondents (60 %) described humorous elements already covered in the questionnaire, three (30 %) described a story that had a light-hearted quality about it (not exactly a humorous one, though), and one (10 %) indicated that the explanation of the text was excellent.

Analysis of Question Four in Questionnaire Number Four

The results of this question suggest that perhaps light-hearted stories may be as engaging as humorous ones and that they help in the retention and understanding of sermon points. The results also confirm that humor is a very personal thing –one individual may view a cute story as humorous and another individual may view the same story as a serious one.

Question Five

When asked what the participants remembered most about the sermon and what was most meaningful to them, seven (59 %) discussed the theme of the day in some detail, one (8 %) mentioned the “Gospel message,” one (8 %) mentioned honesty, two (17 %) talked about the play on words made at the beginning of the sermon, and one (8 %) indicated that the entire sermon was good.

Analysis of Question Five in Questionnaire Number Four

The results of this question indicate that the play on words made at the beginning of the sermon reinforced the theme of the sermon. Connecting “Do the Dew” with “Do the Due” (give God his due) caused the sermon to be more memorable.

Interview Results (30 Interviewees)

Question One¹⁴¹

When asked how they felt about a preacher using humor in sermons, 29 interviewees (97 %) responded positively and one response (3 %) was neutral. Interviewees indicated that they liked humor in sermons and viewed it as useful because it gets people's attention, personalizes the message, relaxes the hearers, engages the hearers, and enables people to relate to the pastor. Three interviewees cautioned that humor should not be overused so that the sermon does not degenerate into mere entertainment.

When asked about the frequency of humor in the sermons at Immanuel Lutheran Church, nineteen interviewees (63 %) indicated that there should be about the same of amount of humor in the preaching at Immanuel, seven (24 %) indicated that they would like about the same amount to more humor in sermons, and four (13 %) indicated that they would like more humor in sermons. Interestingly, one of those who desired more humor cautioned that the preacher should not become a comedian and another stressed that there should not be "a whole lot more" humor in the sermons.

Analysis of Question One in the Interview

The results of this question correspond to the findings of the questionnaires. They affirm that the participants in the interviews like humor in sermons and believe it enhances the message of the sermon. They clearly accept and desire humor in sermons and are probably open to having a little more humor in the sermons at Immanuel. They

¹⁴¹ Appendix D, 67. The responses are found in Appendix E, 71-73.

want to be receptive to God's Word and they want others to be receptive to God's Word, and they believe that humor will help achieve this aim.

Question Two¹⁴²

When asked if the preachers at Immanuel use self-deprecating humor in sermons often, occasionally, or not at all, twenty-seven interviewees (90 %) said "occasionally" and three (10 %) said "often."

When asked how self-deprecating humor made them feel about the preacher, twenty-eight (93 %) responded positively and two responses (7 %) were neutral. Many interviewees expressed appreciation for this kind of humor because it made the pastor seem "more human" and "genuine." One mentioned that it gave him/her a good feeling when the pastor shared something personal. Another suggested that it is "a safe kind of humor."

When asked if they saw any dangers in using self-deprecating humor in preaching, ten (33 %) interviewees saw no danger in it and twenty (67 %) expressed the opinion that overusing it or going overboard with it could be detrimental to the preacher's relationship with congregational members. Those who saw dangers in overusing it cited the loss of the congregation's respect as the main danger. Another cautioned that the pastor should not become a comedian and that overdoing self-deprecating humor may distract the hearers. Still another concern was that overdoing it might trivialize people's concerns.

¹⁴² Appendix D, 67-68. The responses are found in Appendix E, 73-76.

Another interviewee counseled that the preacher must convey that “he is in control” and should not appear to be a fool.

Analysis of Question Two in the Interview

The results of this question correspond with the findings of the questionnaires and the theoretical research. They affirm that participants in the interviews are comfortable with the preacher using self-deprecating humor and even appreciate it. They believe it makes the preacher seem more human and genuine and feel it improves their rapport with him. They are aware of the dangers of this kind of humor, but believe their preachers are in control and will not overuse it.¹⁴³ The participants trust their preachers to bring them the true content of God’s Word in their sermons and to faithfully proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Question Three¹⁴⁴

When asked whether physical humor is appropriate in preaching, twenty-nine (97 %) interviewees indicated that it was and one (3 %) said it was, but that he/she could not see physical humor lending itself to sermons.

When asked to indicate how comfortable they were with physical humor in sermons on a scale of one to ten (ten being the highest), eleven (37 %) said ten, one (3 %) said nine to ten, one (3 %) said nine, one (3 %) said eight to nine, seven (24 %) said eight, two (7 %) said six, three (10 %) said five, one (3 %) said four, two (7 %) said three, and one (3 %) said two. Many interviewees expressed the opinion that physical humor in

¹⁴³ I suspect that ten interviewees saw no danger in using self-deprecating humor because I do not go to extremes when I use it. I usually prefer a light, self-deprecating touch.

¹⁴⁴ Appendix D, 68. The responses are found in Appendix E, 76-78.

sermons is rare, but that it can be used effectively. They also cautioned against hysterics and said that physical humor should relate to the sermon topic. Some responses included:

- Should be careful in using physical humor because it's so unusual in sermons.
Can be intimidating.
- Very appropriate if you get your point across. If in hysterics, you overdid it.
- I don't see a problem as long as it relates to the sermon. More visual –which is good. Holds attention.

When asked if they could give any examples of inappropriate physical humor in sermons, eight interviewees (27 %) could not give an example and twenty-two (73 %) could. Those who provided examples suggested things like: slapstick comedy, falling down, obscene hand gestures, violent movements, imitating people, mimicking handicaps, hitting one's self, mimicking vomiting, and making light of devotional gestures (like crossing one's self).

Analysis of Question Three in the Interview

The results of question three correspond with the findings of the questionnaires. They affirm that the participants in the interviews accept physical humor in sermons as long as it is appropriate, tasteful, and relates to the sermon topic. They understand that this type of humor is unusual in sermons and do not expect a great deal of it. The interviews seem to indicate that Immanuel members trust their pastors to use physical humor appropriately. They also seem to appreciate physical humor because it adds a visual element to the spoken Word.

Question Four¹⁴⁵

When asked if they believed humor in sermons helps them remember sermon points, twenty-nine (97 %) interviewees answered affirmatively and one response (3 %) was neutral. The interviewees were then asked why they thought humor in sermons helps them remember sermon points. Answers included:

- It makes the sermon real.
- It is different from the rest of the sermon. Makes you wonder, “How will it relate to the topic?”
- It involves stories and details, which are easy to remember.
- Makes a personal connection.
- It stands out and grabs your attention.
- It is out of the ordinary. A point of reference.
- We can relate to funny stories because we’ve experienced similar things.
- It is a reference point when we discuss the sermon at home.
- Humor is easy to remember because stories are easy to remember.
- It is a hook. Taps into your primary memory.
- It draws my attention to what comes afterward.
- It breaks the sermon into smaller pieces.

Analysis of Question Four in the Interview

The results of question four correspond to the findings of the questionnaires and theoretical research. They affirm that humor aids in the retention of sermon points and engages the participants in the interviews as they listen to a sermon. They are cognizant

¹⁴⁵ Appendix D, 68. The responses are found in Appendix E, 78-79.

of the fact that humor does help them remember sermon points and have some understanding of why it helps them remember. Although they weren't asked specifically in this question whether humor in sermons helps them understand sermon points, I suspect that most would say that it does. Clearly, participants view humor as a tool of the Gospel –something that makes a sermon easier to remember.

Question Five¹⁴⁶

When asked how puns and silly names affected them, twenty-five interviewees (83 %) indicated that they cause them to listen more carefully, two (7 %) said that they cause them to listen more carefully and groan inwardly, one (3.3 %) said they cause him/her to listen more carefully, groan inwardly, and scratch his/her head in confusion, one response (3.3 %) was neutral, and one (3.3 %) said that puns and silly names do not engage him at all. Those who liked puns indicated that they helped them understand points, caused them to look forward to the next point and brought intelligence to the sermon. One of those who liked puns mentioned that they are thought provoking because they are like a puzzle. The interviewee who indicated that he/she does not find puns engaging mentioned that puns become distracting when the listener does not get them right away.

Analysis of Question Five in the Interview

The results of question five in the interview correspond to the findings of the questionnaires. They indicate that the participants in the interviews generally like puns, silly names and plays on words.¹⁴⁷ Some participants find this type of humor thought

¹⁴⁶ Appendix D, 69. The responses are found in Appendix E, 79-80.

¹⁴⁷ Interviewees were not asked about plays on words specifically, but I suspect they consider a pun to be a play on words.

provoking and clever. Most participants wish them to be done well, but will tolerate a few corny puns. Overall, they seem to view puns and plays on words as mnemonic devices which enable them to remember the content of sermons for longer periods of time. This allows them to apply God's Word to their lives more readily.

Question Six¹⁴⁸

After explaining what exaggerations are, interviewees were asked if they noticed humorous exaggerations in the sermons delivered at Immanuel. Twenty (67 %) noticed humorous exaggerations, nine (30 %) did not remember or notice any, and one (3 %) was not sure how to answer.

After suggesting that exaggerations sometimes go unnoticed because they are used in everyday language, interviewees were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with that suggestion. Seventeen (57 %) interviewees agreed with the suggestion, twelve (40 %) disagreed, and one (3 %) was unsure.

The interviewees were then asked what benefits and drawbacks might there be in using exaggerations. Generally, interviewees had an easier time suggesting benefits rather than drawbacks. Suggested benefits include:

- Exaggerations are attention grabbers. They convey understanding through contrast.
- An exaggeration is a word picture. It is easy to remember.
- Exaggerations signal importance.
- They stir the imagination.
- The use of vivid language gets your point across.

¹⁴⁸ Appendix D, 69. The responses are found in Appendix E, 80-83.

- Exaggerations are unexpected, so they are engaging.
- It communicates the seriousness of a point.
- Old exaggerations are trite. New ones are helpful.
- They make people notice something about themselves.
- Exaggerations may go unnoticed unless they are odd or outrageous.¹⁴⁹

Suggested drawbacks to using exaggerations included:

- Overused, people might think you are overreacting to something and your credibility will be lessened.
- You might offend people by exaggerating something important to them.
- If your exaggeration is too silly, people will be annoyed.
- People may not recognize the exaggeration as an exaggeration.
- Could make the sermon too flowery.
- A literal person may not understand that what you are saying is an exaggeration.
- Some exaggerations are not taken seriously.
- A literal person might be confused.
- An exaggeration might be too personal.
- Overusing exaggerations would be distracting.

Analysis of Question Six in the Interview

The results of question six in the interview correspond with the findings of the questionnaires. They indicate that the participants in the interviews accept and benefit from humorous exaggerations. The vivid language of exaggerations and the dramatic

¹⁴⁹ I agree with this completely. The field research for this MAP seems to bear it out.

contrast between the item exaggerated and the item in ordinary terms gains the attention of the participants in the interviews and helps drive home the point the preacher is attempting to make. However, the results suggest that exaggerations that are used too often become trite and receive little notice. It appears that exaggerations may need to be unusual or outrageous to be engaging and remembered. Since most congregational members have grown up hearing the exaggerations used by Jesus in the Bible, they may be overly familiar with them and may not appreciate the depth and vividness of these exaggerations. Consequently, it may be beneficial for a preacher to explain how and why Jesus' exaggerations are so powerful.

Question Seven¹⁵⁰

After explaining that an imported joke is humor that does not relate to the sermon topic, interviewees were asked how helpful they thought imported jokes might be in preaching. Twenty-one (70 %) responded negatively, six responses (20 %) were positive, and three (10 %) responses were neutral. Those who responded positively to imported jokes cited their ability to grab people's attention as the main benefit. Many also suggested that they would be more effective and appropriate as "openers." Some of the dangers of imported jokes cited by those who responded negatively included:

- They are distracting.
- Might create an atmosphere that is not conducive to worship.
- Humor in sermons should relate to the sermon topic.
- People might think the pastor is not prepared.

¹⁵⁰ Appendix D, 70. The responses are found in Appendix E, 83-85.

- They might throw people for a loop. They would remember the joke and not the sermon.

When interviewees were asked how they felt about imported jokes in general, twenty-one responses (70 %) were negative (e.g., “I don’t like them at all,” and “they have no place in a sermon”), six responses (20 %) were positive, and three (10 %) were neutral. Of those who responded positively, a few qualified their responses by saying that imported jokes should not be used very often.

Analysis of Question Seven in the Interview

The results of this question show a stronger antipathy toward imported jokes than previously indicated by the questionnaires. One possible explanation of this is that I was able to explain what I meant by an imported joke in greater detail. The results of this question and the previous questionnaires lead me to believe that, while the participants in the field research would tolerate an imported joke once in a great while, particularly at the beginning of a sermon, they have a preference for humor that relates to sermon points. I suspect they feel humor should serve a purpose by helping people internalize God’s Word. Humor should not be the focus, but a servant of the text.

Question Eight¹⁵¹

After stating that people relate to stories very well, especially when the stories evoke strong emotions, interviewees were asked whether they felt sermon points were communicated more effectively with serious stories or with humorous ones.

¹⁵¹ Appendix D, 70. The responses are found in Appendix E, 85-86

Fifteen (50 %) interviewees indicated that both types of stories are effective in communicating sermon points, ten (33 %) indicated that serious stories are more effective, and five (17 %) said that humorous stories are more effective. Of those who indicated that both type of stories are effective, three expressed a preference for humorous stories and two expressed a preference for serious stories. Comments made in support of humorous stories being more effective than serious ones included:

- Serous stories make me emotional, and I am already emotionally drained.
- I would rather laugh than cry.
- You lose your train of thought when you cry.

Comments made in support of serious stories being more effective in communicating sermon points included:

- Sermon topics are usually serious. Joking about serious matters might confuse people.
- People are hungry for help for their serious problems
- Brings things to human reality. People relate readily to pain and suffering.

Analysis of Question Eight in the Interview

The results from this question indicate that the participants in the interviews find both types of stories, serious and humorous ones alike, engaging and thought provoking. They view both types of stories as aids to understanding sermon points and desire to have both types of stories in the sermons delivered at Immanuel. Most felt that they should not be pitted against each other, but that each had a place in the preaching of God's Word.

“Besides,” observed one interviewee who said that both types of stories are effective,

“many stories have elements of humor and seriousness.” Both types of stories can be used as tools on behalf of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Focus Group Reaction Papers¹⁵²

The focus group members for this project were the pastors in my circuit. After presenting and explaining the findings of my research, the members of the focus group were asked to write a 2-3 page reaction paper recording their impressions concerning the project and making suggestions for its improvement. What follows are a summary and analysis of the five reaction papers sent to me.

Summary and Analysis of the Focus Group Reaction Papers

Four of the five reaction papers I received expressed appreciation for and affirmation of the project’s findings and guidelines for the effective use of humor in preaching. One reaction paper contained a list of 15 suggestions for the improvement of the project. The writer of this paper felt it was more beneficial to critique what was wrong with the project (and so contribute to the improvement of the project) than to comment on what he felt was correct and helpful.

The data and guidelines regarding self-deprecating humor provided by the project resonated with two of the focus group members. These two participants often use self-deprecating humor in preaching and ministry, but were unaware of its ability to make the preacher seem more genuine and approachable. Another group member expressed

¹⁵² The reaction papers are found in Appendix F, 87-102.

appreciation for the project's examination of how humor can improve the preacher's image with his hearers.

Two participants noted that while sarcasm can be dangerous in preaching, there is a precedent for its use in Scripture. Both Jesus and Paul seem sarcastic at times in their sayings and writings. One of these participants suggested that while it may be inappropriate in preaching, sarcasm may have other literary uses.

Most of the participants were impressed by the amount of bibliographical and field research done for the project. One expressed the view that determining which types of humor are appropriate or inappropriate in humor will be less subjective for him now after reading this project.

Three focus group members felt that the distinction between joy and humor needed further clarification in chapter two. Based on their reactions and the advice of this project's advisor (who happened to agree with them), I added some clarification to the section on Christian joy.

One participant suggested that the project should pay more attention to the relationship between humor and postmodernism. While I agree that this relationship is worthy of exploration, I believe that such a treatment of humor and postmodernism would widen the focus of this project and distract from its purposes. The topic of humor and its relationship to postmodernism would be better served by a separate, later study. It certainly deserves further investigation.

One reaction paper urged caution in stating that all sexual humor should be off limits in preaching. The writer pointed out that preachers today must often address the topic of sexuality in order to provide a balanced, godly view of sex. He further pointed out that

using humor in teaching about God's gift of sex need not degrade sex. This view was also shared by the project's advisor. Consequently, I toned down some of the project's language restricting the use of sexual humor in sermons. Typically, sexual humor is off limits when preaching God's Word because this kind of humor often treats sex in a disparaging way. However, there are situations when presentations about sex are humorous without being disrespectful or degrading. An example of this might be the story John Drakeford tells about a son asking his father where he came from. After the father goes into great detail about human reproduction, the boy reveals that he simply wants to know *from which state he came*.¹⁵³ Sexual humor in preaching or teaching would not be inappropriate when handled in this way.

The aforementioned writer also suggested that humor should be defined to bring greater clarity to the project. He felt that distinct definitions of what humor is would make the argument that humor is appropriate in preaching much stronger. On the surface, this seems like a reasonable suggestion. However, there are a number of difficulties inherent in carrying out this suggestion. First, after reading numerous books on the topic of humor, it seems clear to me that defining humor is an extremely difficult and complex task. To quote a fellow pastor, "Defining humor is like trying to nail down Jell-O." Second, defining humor and examining how things become humorous would move beyond the scope of this project. While defining humor and analyzing the phenomenon of humor are certainly worthy of study, such an investigation should be undertaken as a separate project.

¹⁵³ This story can be found on page 37-38 of this MAP.

Finally, two participants expressed initial skepticism over the usefulness of this project in their reaction papers. In short, they did not think humor in preaching was a worthy topic for a Major Applied Project. However, after reading the paper, hearing the presentation, and participating in the ensuing discussion, their minds were changed completely. They now regard the project as valuable and useful for the pastoral ministry. Both participants admitted that they have already put some of the findings and guidelines into practice.

Summary of the Questionnaires, Interviews, and Reaction Papers

The completed questionnaires and interviews clearly show that participants in the research accept and desire a certain amount of humor in the sermons delivered at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Waterloo, IL. Based on the interviews, most participants view the present amount of humor in the sermons delivered at Immanuel as sufficient, but would be open to a little more. It seems quite clear that the members enjoy the humor and that it enhances their rapport with their pastors. It also seems to increase their retention and comprehension of sermon points.

Although generally accepted and viewed as an aid to the comprehension of sermon points, the participants in this research understand the risks of physical humor and are cognizant of the fact that this kind of humor does not readily lend itself to preaching. They accept it as a rare occurrence and trust that their pastors will use it appropriately.

While the experts I encountered in my theoretical research discouraged the use of “imported” jokes (humor that does not relate to the topic), indicating they are a distraction to effective communication, the results of the field research for this project

indicate that imported jokes would be accepted by the participants occasionally, especially at the beginning of a sermon. However, the results of the field research also indicate that participants have a preference for humor that relates to the sermon topic or points. Neither of Immanuel's pastors use this type of humor, and the members seem to support them in their choice not to use it. In the absence of such humor, I do not envision Immanuel members clamoring for imported jokes.

A number of the experts that I encountered in my theoretical research presented hyperbole (exaggeration) as a type of humor frequently found in the Bible and encouraged its use. They suggested that the element of surprise and the vividness of language found in hyperbole make it and the points made with it memorable. The results of the field research for this Major Applied Project suggest that many participants notice humorous exaggerations and feel that they are useful in making strong points in a sermon. However, both the results of the questionnaires and the interviews seem to indicate that exaggerations need to be out of the ordinary or outrageous to be remembered. Since humorous exaggerations tend to qualify as odd or outrageous, I believe humorous exaggerations will be noticed and remembered by the members of Immanuel. My only caution would be that these exaggerations should not be too silly lest they become annoying to the hearers.

The field research for this project tends to confirm the findings of the project's theoretical research regarding self-deprecating humor, namely, that self-deprecating humor causes hearers to identify with the speaker and creates a rapport between the hearers and speaker. Most participants in the research appreciate this kind of humor in their pastors and feel it makes the pastors more human and approachable. They relate

easily to the personal nature of this type of humor and feel that it enhances their understanding of the sermon and their pastors. Although generally aware of the dangers connected with self-deprecating humor (such as the hearer's loss of confidence in the speaker's abilities), the participants seem confident that their pastors will not take this kind of humor too far. I sense that they view the ability to engage in self-deprecating humor as a desirable quality.

Based on the results of the field research, humorous anecdotes appear to be highly effective in grabbing and keeping the attention of the participants in the research. This most certainly corresponds with the findings of my theoretical research which strongly encourage the use of anecdotes as attention grabbers. After listening to a humorous anecdote, most field research participants were able to recall the story and articulate the point of the story. Furthermore, these participants seem to grasp the powerful dynamics and benefits of stories, both humorous and serious one, and view them as effective tools in service to the Gospel.

However, some results from the questionnaires suggest that the point of an anecdote may be lost if the story is too personal or comical. Additionally, it may be lost if the story does not have a strong connection to the point being made. Perhaps this is because people are so busy controlling the flood of ensuing emotions and memories that their minds are too preoccupied to discern the point of the story. Nevertheless, the benefits of using humorous, personal anecdotes usually far outweigh any negative effects. What is more, humorous anecdotes of a less personal nature or anecdotes that have a light-hearted quality about them are extremely useful in making sermon points. It is less likely that the point of a story will be lost when these types of anecdotes are told.

The results of the questionnaires and interviews demonstrate that the members who participated in the research are open to puns, plays on words and silly names. They find them engaging, thought provoking and helpful in following the topic of the sermon. Plays on words, in particular, seem to strengthen recall of sermon points, aiding in the remembrance of the sermon long after it has been delivered. And although many of the participants in the field research desire clever puns and thoughtful plays on words, it appears they would good-naturedly tolerate an occasional corny pun.

For the most part, my experiences as the administrative pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church affirm the results of the field research. However, I was surprised (and not in an adverse way) by some of the findings. I did not anticipate the degree of receptivity to humor that most of the participants in the field research demonstrated, nor did I anticipate the degree of receptivity that they demonstrated toward puns, plays on words, and well chosen physical humor. Although I do not use these types of humor often, I am comfortable with them. In light of this field research, I will be less reticent to use them in the future.

I was also surprised (again, not in an adverse way) by the rapport that humor, particularly humor with a light, self-deprecating touch, creates between the research participants and their pastors. It touches me deeply and humbles me when I hear these members say that the humor in my sermons makes them feel closer to me. I do not believe that I am the type of person who will use humor simply to be liked. I want to use humor to enhance receptivity to and understanding of God's Word among the people God has entrusted to my care. These people are God's gifts to me and I want them to grow in

faith and love of the Lord. But if this humor makes them feel closer to me, I will praise God for it and consider that closeness a marvelous, additional blessing.

Generally, the reaction papers of the focus group affirmed the project findings, particularly regarding the use of self-deprecating humor. Two out of the five pastors who wrote reaction papers commented on how the use of self-deprecating humor helped them form closer bonds with their members. They further agreed with the project's findings which suggest that self-deprecating humor makes the pastor seem more genuine and approachable. Although one group member questioned the finding that sarcasm is not an appropriate form of humor in sermons, the guidelines created from the data of this project were generally viewed as correct and useful. A number of focus group members observed that these guidelines are useful not only for the task of preaching, but for the work of ministry in general.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND GUIDELINES

Contributions to Ministry

This project focused on the effect that humor has on the members of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Waterloo, IL, and what types of humor are most useful in gaining the attention of those members and enhancing their understanding of Biblical truths. By analyzing members' responses to questionnaires regarding the humor in sermons recently delivered during Immanuel's worship services and listening to members discuss their views on humor in interviews, I was able to gain a greater awareness of their receptivity to God's Word. Further, I gained a greater understanding of the aids that can be used to increase that receptivity and the place of humor in enhancing Immanuel members' understanding the truth of Scripture. Preaching is essential for the communication of God's Word and a life transformed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Thus, without disregarding the efficacy and power of God's Word, preachers need to be open to using all the tools that God has given to them to gain a hearing of God's Word and drive home the meaning of Biblical truths. It is critical that preachers use the best communication skills they can muster in service to God's Word of Law and Gospel.

The results of the research of this project demonstrate clearly that humor can be used as a tool to engage listeners and aid them in their understanding of a sermon. Although humor cannot be used to convey the truth of the event of Jesus' suffering and death on

the cross,¹⁵⁴ humor can be used to increase people's understanding of God's Law, the sanctified life, the joy of salvation, the joy of Jesus' resurrection, and the fruits of the Gospel.¹⁵⁵ An additional benefit of humor in sermons is that it improves the rapport between congregational members and their pastors. Although making members like the preacher cannot be the sole motivation for using humor in sermons, liking the pastor can be a tremendous blessing to that pastor's ministry –especially when his humor makes him seem more genuine, humble and approachable (the very qualities a servant ought to have). Further, church members will be more receptive to his messages since people are more likely to listen to a preacher to whom they are well disposed.

While humor certainly has the potential to overpower and overshadow the message of God's Word, a stubborn unwillingness to use it, especially when the preacher has natural humorous tendencies, would be unwise. The benefits of using humor appropriately are too numerous to ignore. In the words of corporate communications expert Jude Westerfield, "While poorly delivered, inappropriate, or sarcastic jokes will backfire on you, be assured that the right joke can win your audience over from the get-go."¹⁵⁶ Care should be taken in using humor in sermons, but humor may be used.

In light of this, the results of the research for this project have been used to create guidelines for the appropriate and effective use of humor in the sermons delivered at Immanuel Lutheran Church, Waterloo, IL. The primary beneficiary of these guidelines is

¹⁵⁴ David Buttrick said it best when he observed that the Gospel is "ultimately a serious matter" (*Homiletics*, 95). While this is true, I suggest that Buttrick may have overlooked the supreme joy of the resurrection when he made the statement.

¹⁵⁵ Covered on pages 46-48 of this MAP.

¹⁵⁶ Jude Westerfield, *I Have to Give a Presentation, Now What?* (New York: Silver Lining Books, 2000), 26.

the researcher himself. These guidelines will help me avoid the pitfalls of offensive and ineffective humor in preaching and aid me in maximizing the positive effects of using humor in sermons. The positive effects produced by these guidelines include a greater receptivity to preaching (so that God's proclaimed Word may be heard), a better understanding of God's Word as expounded by the preacher, and a greater retention of Biblical truths among Immanuel members.

These guidelines may also benefit other preachers who wish to use God's gift of humor in a responsible, God pleasing way to enhance their preaching and their members' hearing and understanding of God's Word. Some of these guidelines will pertain specifically to the members of Immanuel Lutheran Church. Others will be virtually universal and applicable to almost every Christian congregation in the United States. Every individual pastor, using his knowledge of his own humorous tendencies and his understanding of the attitudes of his congregational members, must judge which types of humor will best work in his context.

Finally, these guidelines will benefit the members of my congregation. In addition to all the benefits for hearers already mentioned, congregational members benefit when their preachers work hard at communicating effectively, using all the tools that God has granted his people. It is when preachers are satisfied with the present state of their preaching abilities and see no need to improve their communications skills that members suffer. Further, congregational members benefit when they know their preacher is interested in what they think and what kind effect his sermons have on them. This does not mean that the preacher is going to tailor make his sermons to suit their tastes or whims. But it does demonstrate to the members that their pastor is a true *Seelsorger* (one

who cares for souls) who wants them to have all the fullness and riches of God's Word. Such a pastor is a steward—a faithful steward of “all the mysteries of God” (1 Cor. 4:1).

GUIDELINES

For the Appropriate and Effective Use of Humor in Sermons

Off Limits

1. Off-Color Sexual Humor. Although the use of sexual humor is pandemic in the world of comedy today, it has little place in the church of Christ. Although preachers may discuss sex in sermons in order to teach and affirm that sex is a good gift of God, sexual humor that degrades this wonderful gift is to be avoided. As St. Paul writes: “Among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place” (Eph. 5:3-4 NIV). Humor in sermons must not be offensive—and off-color sexual humor is offensive both to God and to God's people because it denigrates God's gift of sex. There should be no question that this kind of humor is to be avoided in the task of preaching and teaching God's Word.
2. Sarcasm. There is a great temptation for preachers to use sarcasm in sermons to make a point. Some feel that a little “bite” to the humor will make a point stronger (it certainly gets the attention of the hearers). Further, it often has a cathartic effect on the preacher. However, the basis of sarcasm is ridicule. As David Buttrick has

correctly pointed out, sarcasm is “always a veiled form of hostility.”¹⁵⁷ Such humor is incompatible with Christ’s message of peace.

Sarcasm directed toward congregational members is especially dangerous. As much as a preacher tries to veil the sarcasm directed at members, they most certainly detect it. This is counterproductive to reaching people with the Gospel and making a godly impact on their lives. In his book *The Art of Talking So That People Will Listen: Getting Through to Family, Friends, and Business Associates*, author Paul Swets suggests that we reach people by respecting them. He suggests that speakers “check their attitudes” and “think highly of the people they are with” in order to win an audience.¹⁵⁸ Sarcasm in sermons does not convey the feeling that the preacher likes his hearers. And when hearers perceive that the preacher does not like them, they will return the favor –by rejecting what he has to say to them. Sarcastic comments may feel good at the time, but they will come back to haunt the preacher.

Risky Humor

3. Physical Humor in the Form of Impersonations. Unless you are a professional comedian, it is unlikely that your impersonations will be done well. Furthermore, impersonations are often a form of sarcasm in which the person being impersonated is ridiculed. It is possible that hearers will view impersonations of political figures as disrespectful, thus violating Peter’s admonition that God’s people should “honor the king” (1 Peter 2:17, NIV). Although the results of the field research for this

¹⁵⁷ David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 146.

¹⁵⁸ Paul Swets, *The Art of Talking So That People Will Listen: Getting Through to Family, Friends, and Business Associates* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1983), 81.

project proved to be inconclusive regarding impersonations, two participants in the interviews expressed a dislike for pastors imitating people when asked about physical humor. Because of the distinct possibility of ridiculing of others in impersonations and because of its association with professional comedians, I suspect that most church members are not comfortable with a pastor engaging in this kind of humor.

4. Imported Jokes. An imported joke is a joke that does not relate to the topic or the point of a sermon. Typically, these jokes are told for the amusement of the hearers or to gain the hearers' attention.

Almost all communication experts advise against this kind of humor because it does not lend itself to topic points and may actually distract hearers from the message the speaker wishes to convey. Used in sermons, it may give people the impression that the preacher wants to be a comedian and that he is using this type of humor merely to entertain. If the preacher does relate this kind of humor to a sermon topic, he usually must take a great deal of time and engage in mental gymnastics to make it fit (it may require a number of sermon introductions). All this distracts listeners from the actual theme of the sermon.

Although many research participants expressed a willingness to hear an imported joke at an "opener," they also expressed a strong preference for humor that relates to the sermon topic. My sense is that most people are open to imported jokes, but that they should be used very sparingly. Another drawback is that imported jokes often leave hearers with the impression that this humor is canned and not natural to the

speaker. They may wonder where they have heard the joke before – which deflects interest away from the sermon topic.

Effective, But Use With Care

5. Exaggerations or Hyperbole. It can be argued that there is a strong Biblical precedent for exaggerations or hyperbole, particularly in the New Testament. Clearly exaggeration was utilized when Jesus talked about the Pharisees straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel (Matt. 23:24) and the likelihood of a rich man entering the kingdom of God being as remote as a camel going through the eye of a needle (Matt. 19:24). Although we do not know whether these exaggerations evoked a great deal of laughter among his original hearers, Jesus' exaggerations certainly have an odd, light-hearted quality that must have gained the attention of his audience.

The field research for this project suggests that humorous exaggerations or hyperbole do grab the attention of the hearers and drive home a point in a powerful way. The stark contrast between the thing exaggerated and its appearance in ordinary terms causes it to be remembered and considered thoughtfully. The vivid language inherent in exaggerations also causes them to be remembered.

However, since exaggerations tend to be used in everyday language and may quickly become old and trite, there appears to be a need for an exaggeration to be odd or outrageous in order to be remembered. At the same time, care must be taken not to make the exaggeration too silly or to flippantly exaggerate things that are sacred to hearers. The former may result in the hearers' annoyance. The latter may result in the hearers' outrage over an exaggeration thought to be too personal or disrespectful.

Since exaggerations are often used in everyday language, it is advisable for the preacher to use them thoughtfully and intentionally. Some exaggerations may escape notice, but planned, well-thought out exaggerations are usually noticed and appreciated. What is more, it is unlikely that the preacher will be accused of reducing his sermon to mere entertainment when he uses exaggerations. Done well, exaggerations are likely to make a point in “memorable fashion.”¹⁵⁹

6. Physical Humor. A speaker engages in physical humor when he makes gestures or movements that evoke laughter. While physical humor does not readily lend itself to preaching, it can be used in sermons and, when chosen well, can be a great benefit in communicating a point. The addition of a visual image grabs the hearers’ attention and the humor relaxes them so that the preacher’s point is easily comprehended and remembered. Further, physical humor makes the preacher seem more animated and interesting.

The main difficulty in using this type of humor is finding forms that relate to the sermon topic and do not seem cartoonish. Slapstick comedy or gestures that are violent or abrupt are likely to be offensive and distracting to the hearers. Additionally, many preachers are not comfortable with this type of humor. Since preachers should only use types of humor with which they are comfortable, physical humor should be excluded from the humor repertoire of preachers who find it outside their comfort zone or distasteful.

7. Self-deprecating Humor. Self-deprecating humor is used when a speaker makes fun of himself or makes light of himself. While making fun of one’s self seems

¹⁵⁹ Bruce Mawhinney, *Preaching with Freshness* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1997), 255.

degrading and destructive to good relationships at first glance, self-deprecating humor is actually useful in establishing a good rapport between the speaker and his hearers. When used in sermons, it leaves people with the impression that the preacher is genuine,¹⁶⁰ approachable, and confident in his abilities. Furthermore, it is possible to use self-deprecating humor to make sermon points, particularly in the preaching of the Law. An additional benefit is that it is unlikely to offend other people since the humor is not directed at them.

There is a danger that self-deprecating humor can be overdone, causing hearers to question the speaker's abilities. Overdone, it may lead people to have a self-righteous attitude ("What a dunce! I would never do that!") or question whether the speaker is fishing for compliments. For these reasons, it is better for the preacher to use a *light*, self-deprecating touch when he engages in this kind of humor.

One of the greatest drawbacks of this kind of humor is that it is so rare. The research for this project¹⁶¹ has shown that people respond to self-deprecating humor positively and view it as a very desirable quality. Yet very few people actually engage in it! In the words of Avner Ziv, people spend so much time and effort presenting themselves in a good light that they "suspect presenting themselves humorously will hurt their image."¹⁶²

It is quite possible that many preachers do not feel comfortable using this kind of humor, especially when they believe that congregational members criticize them unfairly. Again, since the types of humor a preacher uses ought to be natural to him

¹⁶⁰ Many interviewees used the word "human" in describing how self-deprecating humor made them feel about the preacher.

¹⁶¹ See 52-55 of this MAP.

¹⁶² Avner Ziv, *Personality and Sense of Humor* (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 1984), 61.

and ought to be something with which he is comfortable, any discomfort in using self-deprecating humor on the preacher's part is a strong indication that he should not use it.

8. Humorous Personal Stories. Humorous personal stories are highly effective in gaining the attention of hearers and drawing them (almost imperceptibly) into the sermon. People relate to the personal experiences of the speaker, calling to mind similar experiences in their own lives and relishing the joy and fun of those experiences. This kind of story is easily remembered by hearers and contributes to a feeling of good will toward the speaker. Congregational members may remember humorous personal stories told by a preacher years after they have been told.

However, there are some dangers to consider. According to some of the data uncovered during the field research phase of this project, the point of a humorous personal story may be lost if the story is too personal or humorous. The hearers will remember the story in great detail, along with the ensuing feelings of nostalgia and contentment. But they may not be able to recall the point of it all, especially when the story has a weak connection to the sermon point or topic. The story will evoke good feelings and pleasant memories, but may not serve the text or topic. Preachers would do well, then, to make sure the point or lesson of the story is clear and plainly understood. They may even wish to tone down certain details in the story so that it does not overwhelm the point of the story.

Highly Effective Types of Humor

9. Humorous Anecdotes. An anecdote is a short, amusing story. Humorous anecdotes

or anecdotes with a light-hearted quality about them are extremely useful in illustrating a sermon topic or point. They have the power to gain (and sometimes regain if the sermon topic is difficult or emotionally draining) the hearers' attention. These anecdotes often have a surprising "aha!" effect on listeners ("Now I know what he's getting at!") and leave them with a feeling of satisfaction and accomplishment. Telling anecdotes that have a light-hearted quality is a form of humor that can be easily developed, even by preachers who do not think of themselves as having a good sense of humor. Much of it involves telling a good story with a happy ending, or making a light-hearted observation about something that relates to the sermon topic. There are few dangers inherent in the use of this type of humor.

10. Puns, Plays on Words, and Silly Names. Although puns, plays on words, and silly names are often viewed as cheap and corny, the data from the field research for this project strongly indicates that puns, plays on words, and silly names receive a favorable response from most church members. When a play on words relates to the sermon title or theme, it helps listeners remember the message long after the sermon has been delivered. This type of humor impresses people as being thoughtful, clever and illustrative. It may not cause them to laugh out loud, but people appreciate its subtleties and the way it helps them connect the sermon points together ("It's like a puzzle," said one interviewee).

While not everyone is a fan of puns, it appears that puns are tolerated even by those with whom puns do not resonate. And while preachers should make every effort to choose their examples of this type of humor wisely, I suspect that their

hearers will tolerate an occasional corny pun or weak play on words. Just avoid making a habit of it!

Final Recommendations

Based on the findings of the research for this project, I wholeheartedly believe that preachers should develop their naturally humorous tendencies and use humor as a tool in service to the Gospel. Boundaries, of course, are needed. There are dangers to both hearers and the preacher when the preacher's humor is uncontrolled and undisciplined. But the need for discipline should not deter a preacher from utilizing humor in sermons. Personal guidelines and boundaries for the use of humor can be established for almost any context of ministry.

It is essential that, as a preacher uses humor in sermons, he be aware of the limits of the rhetorical device of humor, utilize the humor that is natural to him, and use the types of humor that are accepted by and have the greatest positive spiritual impact on the members of his congregation. I predict that this approach will bring joy to his ministry and be a tremendous blessing to the members of his congregation as, together, pastor and members strive to better understand the truth of God's Word, grow in faith, and communicate the Gospel message with those around them. Above all, let the preacher be faithful to the truth of God's Word in his sermons because, whether he uses humor in sermons or not, the power to reconcile people to God and transform lives is found in the saving message of Christ Jesus. God blesses the preacher's efforts, not because he is so clever and skilled, but because God is so good. "Let him who has my word speak it faithfully. For what has straw to do with grain?" declares the Lord. "Is not my word like

fire,” declares the Lord, “and like a hammer that breaks a rock to pieces?” (Jer. 23:28-29, NIV). The power belongs to God. Let Christian preachers take the fire and the hammer in hand and, with joy and good humor, rock the world!

APPENDIX A

SERMONS THAT SERVED AS THE BASIS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRES

Sermon Preached on July 12-13, 2008

The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

“What’s in a Name?”

Exodus 20:7

(All humorous elements are italicized)

Exodus 20:7. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Shakespeare’s Juliet said it first. “What’s in a name? A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” She said that because she was attracted to a young man named Romeo Montague, the son of a hated family enemy. Her point was, “So what if Romeo’s last name is Montague. It doesn’t matter what his name is. I like him even if he has the wrong last name.”

What’s in a name? Not much, according to Juliet. According to Juliet, we’re not defined by our names. They’re nice to have. After all, they identify us from the mass of people around us. We all need names. But there’s not much significance in a name. It’s just a handle.

Not disrespect to Juliet, but she was wrong. Dead wrong. A name is precious. Important. It conveys so much more than mere identification. We want names to reflect something of the dignity we have as human beings, the dignity we have as unique creations of God. Consider how parents agonize over the choice of a baby’s name.

Parents would never name a baby “Amanda Hugginkiss” or “Dan Druff.” Names like that would subject kids to all sorts of ridicule and teasing. They’d have a very hard time maintaining a sense of dignity.

Even when your name isn’t easy to corrupt, even when your name isn’t easy to make fun of, people often misuse your name. I was named after my grandfather, Antonin. He was a very dignified, intelligent man... Grandpa’s nickname was Tonik –and my nickname is Tony. Tony’s a fine name. I’m proud of it. But it can be corrupted pretty easily in order to tease. *When I was called “Tony Baloney” or “Tony Macoroni” the first 2-3 times, it was kind of funny. But after being called that two/three hundred times, it gets old.*

Of course, it’s unlikely that our names will be misused in all the different ways names can be misused. *If someone was walking through the living room in the middle of the night on his way to the bathroom and he stubbed his toe on the coffee table, it’s unlikely that he’d yell, “Oh Tony, that hurt! Tony, that’s gonna leave a mark!”* It’s unlikely that our names will be used as exclamation points or filler. *“Oh my Tony, look at that!”* It’s unlikely that our names will be used to curse people. But if our names were misused in those ways, we wouldn’t like it. Not one bit. Our names are precious! Misusing our names demeans us. Robs us of our dignity.

Brothers and sisters, God feels the same way about his name. God’s name is any name by which God has made himself known, and God’s name reflects something of his care, dignity and power. Calling God “Father” reflects God’s love and care of us. He’s like a father! Calling God “Almighty” reflects his power. Calling God “Lord” reflects his headship over us, his right to direct our lives. Calling the second person of the Trinity

“Jesus” reflects his sacrifice for us. Jesus means Savior! All these names for God are precious. Misusing them is demeaning. Insulting. Disrespectful to God. And God doesn’t like it. Misusing God’s name flies in the face of God’s second top priority.

One of the strengths of Luther’s Small Catechism is Luther’s explanation of the commandments. After reciting a commandment, Luther asks, “What does this mean?” He answers by telling us what God doesn’t want us to do in this particular commandment and what he wants us to do. In explaining the Second Commandment Luther writes...

Some of Luther’s explanation of the Second Commandment is pretty easy to understand. We shouldn’t use God’s name to curse...Swear...Use Satanic arts...

We might be a little fuzzy on what it means to lie and deceive in God’s name, but it happens all the time. We lie and deceive by God’s name when we use it to convince people of a lie. We want to impose our will, but say it’s God’s will. A dishonest TV evangelist might say, “Hey, God is going to pull the plug on this ministry unless you send me \$30,000.” A cult leader might say to one of his woman followers, “Listen, I know you’re married, but God says it’s O.K. if you sleep with me. I know it looks like adultery, but God wants us to do this.” *A husband might say to his wife, “I prayed about it –and God wants me to buy this new boat.”* In ordinary life, we call this “forgery.” You’re using someone else’s name to get what you want. Understandably, God is very concerned about how we use his name.

In his Small Catechism, Luther also tells what we’re to do with God’s name. God wants us to use his name to pray, praise and give thanks. This is good and God pleasing.

Because Jesus died for our sins and rose again, we’ve been restored to God. We were once alienated from God because we so often ignore and break the Ten Commandments,

but Jesus brought us into a Father/child relationship with God through his work on the cross. We have Christ's forgiveness, and so we can approach God boldly in prayer. We have the freedom to call on his name and pour out our souls to him.

In Psalm 50 the Lord declares, "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you and you will honor me." When people read that, they sometimes think that they should only call on God's name in prayer when they're in trouble. It should be used as a last resort. *It's like the time a pastor did some marital counseling with an older couple. At the end of the session, he told them, "Why don't we close with prayer?" With a very grave look of concern on his face, the husband turned to the pastor and said, "Pastor, do you think it's come to that?"*

Calling upon the name of the Lord in prayer isn't supposed to be a last resort. The Bible tells us we should pray all the time. Regularly. Without ceasing. In Psalm 50 the Lord is urging us to pray especially when we're in trouble. Calling on the name of the Lord should be the first thing that comes to your mind when you're in trouble. The moment you feel stressed out, say, "Lord, help me! Lord, give me strength." God will deliver you –and you will honor him.

Speaking of using God's name to honor him, God also wants us to use his name to praise him and thank him. Now, it's true that we can and should use God's name to praise him and give him thanks in our daily lives. But this use of God's name is especially appropriate in corporate worship, when God's people are together to pray, praise and give thanks. We don't come here to sing about and praise ourselves, but to sing about and praise our Lord. We talk about God and what he's done. We don't come

here to talk to ourselves. We come here to talk to the Lord in prayer as a family. The family of God.

God wants us to use his name to sing out hymns and speak out his praises. I recently heard a pastor talk about what worship looks like according to the book of Revelation. According to Revelation, we should just sing out. We should just make a joyful noise to the Lord and shout out God's praises. It doesn't matter what you sound like. God likes it loud. In Revelation you come across so many passages that talk about the roar of a great multitude as they worship God. There are shouting, and peals of thunder, and singing that sounds like rushing water. It's loud. This pastor who did the study on worship in the book of Revelation went on to say that, even if you have a bad voice, you should really sing out. Belt it out. Being loud is what counts. *And if you have a bad voice and sing loudly, the people with good voices will sing even louder --to drown you out. I talked to our Music Director, Rev. Johnson, and he thinks that's right. That's the way worship should be.*

In the Lutheran Church we like to emphasize the fact that God ministers to us in worship. God strengthens our faith and encourages us as we hear God's Word and receive the sacraments. The Word of God in hymns is very uplifting... But we also worship because God commands it. Because it's our response to his love. Because God deserves it. The song the elders and living creatures sang in Rev. 5 says it all. They sang, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise! Because you were slain, and purchased for God with your blood men from every tribe and language and people and nation." God's name is worthy to be used in prayer, praise and thanks.

What's in a name? Plenty, according to God. God's name reflects who he is and what he's done for us. His name is precious. So may God grant us the strength to use his name properly –not in cursing, or swearing, or lying and deceiving. God grant us the strength to use his name to praise, honor and adore him now and through all eternity.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

Sermon Preached on August 16-17, 2008
The Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Exodus 20:15
“Waterloo Vice”

(All humorous elements are italicized)
Ex. 20:15. You shall not steal.

(I gave the text and introduction in the nave. After that I walked up to a member sitting in the congregation and delivered the following sentences) *I hope this isn't too much out of character, but (making my hand look like a pistol), “Stick ‘em up. Give me your wallet. Seriously, give me your wallet!”*

That's what most people think of when you talk about breaking the Seventh Commandment. Armed robbery. Or they think of burglary. Someone breaks into your house and steals your TV and computers. He makes off with the silver set your Uncle Fred gave you when you got married. And certainly these are violations of the Seventh Commandment. These are obvious examples of stealing. Yet we often break the Seventh Commandment in more subtle ways. Ways that seem pretty innocent to most people -- but are just as damaging to people's lives and offensive to God as armed robbery or burglary. Let me give you a few examples.

First, we steal by deceiving customers. By withholding important facts and information in order --by misleading people-- to make a sale. We've all seen examples of this, haven't we? It happens when a repairman makes unnecessary repairs. When a doctor makes unnecessary tests. *When we sell a car by advertising it as “A real gem.” “Hardly ever driven.” The truth is, it was hardly ever driven because you couldn't get the car in gear!*

If you've ever bought a house, you know what I'm talking about. The real estate brochure says, "starter home." That means one bedroom, no bath. "A real challenge." That means the house was hit by an atomic bomb. Smoke is still rising from the rubble. My point is, we steal when we cheat people. When we use deception to sell things.

This was a problem faced by Amos in the days of ancient Israel. People in Amos' day only thought getting ahead. They wanted that dream house and *new chariot* no matter what it took. Even if it meant cheating. Speaking through Amos in Amos 8:4-5, the Lord said: "Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land saying, 'When will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath ended that we may market wheat?' You who skimp the measure, and boost the price, and cheat with dishonest scales. You buy the poor for next to nothing... The Lord has sworn that he will never forget what you have done. The land will tremble." Cheating. God doesn't like it.

We also steal when we fail to repay loans. When we buy things we can't afford and fail to repay loans, it causes us anguish. No one wants creditors breathing down his neck, or the repo man beating down his door. More than that, though, when you fail to repay a loan, you break your word and violate a trust. You deprive people of the property or money that's due them.

The Lord says through the Apostle Paul in Romans 13:8, "Let no debt remain outstanding except the continuing debt to love one another." That doesn't mean we can't take out loans. There are certain things we're going have to buy on credit. You're going have to take out a loan to buy a house. Most people can't buy a car out right. They have

to finance it. And that's O.K. as long as you're serious about paying the loan back!

When we buy something on credit, we need to make sure we can pay for the purchase.

This is a huge problem in the United States. People in our culture buy stuff without considering whether they can actually pay for it. Let me illustrate what I mean by asking you a question. If a friend or a relative wanted to borrow \$5,000, how many of you would think long and hard about loaning them the money? How many of you would be afraid to loan them the money? (I had them raise their hands) See what I mean? So many people fail to repay loans. So many people aren't serious about repaying loans. This kind of stealing destroys trust and endangers friendships, families, and the stability of communities. And God doesn't like it.

Third, we steal when we deceive the government. When we cheat on our taxes. Paul says in Rom. 13:7: "If you owe taxes, pay taxes." Governments provide services for citizens—roads, police protection, public schools. And these services are paid for with taxes. Everyone who enjoys the services provided by the government needs to pay taxes. Jesus even taught this. Remember when the Jewish rulers wanted to trap Jesus? Make him look bad? They asked him, "Teacher, is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"... We may not like taxes. They may not seem fair. But we need them. If we steal from the government by cheating on our taxes, those wonderful services that we all enjoy might come to an end. Things like roads, the mail, laws, police protection.

Again, this is a huge problem in our culture. If they could get away with it, I'm sure a lot of people would cheat on their income tax. They'd pat themselves on the back if they fooled the IRS. *The story is told of a guy who cheated on his taxes and heard a message like this in church. He felt bad, so he sent \$500 to the IRS with this letter attached: "I*

wasn't real honest about my tax return, so here's \$500.” Then he wrote at the bottom, *“P. S. If I still feel guilty, I'll send the rest later.”* Clearly, we need the Holy Spirit to stir our consciences to honesty and integrity when it comes to paying taxes.

Finally, we steal when we defraud the Lord. When we fail to use the abundance God has given us for offerings and to help the needy. The Lord spoke through the prophet in Malachi 3:8, “Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, ‘How do we rob you?’ In tithes and offerings.” Even in these hard economic times, we have a lot of material goods. We have so, so much. And this is a gift of God. It's from his hand and God doesn't want us to feel guilty for being prosperous. No. He wants us to feel responsible. He wants us to have compassion for others. He wants us to use our abundance to do the work of the church and help the needy. He gives to us so we can give to others. As Jesus says, “Freely you have received. Freely give.”

Well, why should we be honest? Why should we be conscientious about not stealing and helping our neighbors protect and improve what they have? Certainly we want to be honest because our Lord has been so good to us and we want to be like him. Out of love for Christ, we want to lead the kind of life he wants us to live. But the Bible says there are other reasons to be honest.

First, God sees you. He sees everything you do. Job said, “The eyes of God are on the ways of men; he sees their every step. There is no dark place, no deep shadow, where evil doers can hide.” In other words, you can't fool God!

Before I accepted the call to my second church in New Haven, Michigan, the congregation was served by a pastor who was legally blind. He could see, but just barely. When he read Scripture, he held the Bible like this with a magnifying glass in his hand.

When he led the services on Sunday morning, he had to be very careful to keep from stumbling –he couldn't see the steps very well. When he taught at the church's day school, a lot of the kids would pass notes and not pay attention --because he couldn't see 'em. They got away with murder! Two days after I became the pastor of that church, I was testing the memory work of the older students in the day school. I had them write out part of the Apostles' Creed and "What does this mean?" The kids were busy taking the test when I noticed two boys in the back of the room with their catechisms open on the floor. They were looking down and copying catechism. They were cheating. I was a little upset with them over their dishonesty and the blatant attempts to cheat. *I walked to them and asked, "What do you think you're doing? I can see those catechisms clearly. Do you think I'm blind?" As soon as I said that, it occurred to me, "Yes, they do. They think you're blind. They forgot you're not the vacancy pastor and assumed you couldn't see them cheat."* You know what? Those students fooled the vacancy pastor. They probably fooled me somewhere down the line. But they couldn't fool God. He sees it all.

Second, we should be honest because we reap what we sow. The Bible clearly teaches that there will be consequences –painful, unpleasant consequences-- for our sins in this life and we will have to suffer them. If you're a thief and you continue to steal, you'll eventually be caught. You'll go to jail or have to pay restitution or both. If you're just a petty thief, people will eventually catch on and avoid you. They're not going to trust you. When you come around, they're gonna lock their car doors and keep you out of the house. People who steal wind up leading very lonely, bitter lives. Because you reap what you sow.

Finally, we should be honest and not steal because we have everything we need. Because God supplies our every need. God gives us food, clothing, a place to live. He equips so we can work and support our families. When we work, he gives us more than we need so we can help others. *When I'm hungry, I just open the refrigerator door, and there it is --food. Even on the hottest day in summer, I'm cool. I've got central air. Ladies, let me ask you this. How many shoes do you have in your closet? Does your closet look like a shoe factory exploded in it? The point is, we don't have to steal because God gives us everything we need. And then some.*

This is especially true when it comes to our relationship with God. We need God. He gives us the only kind of life worth living. Our lives are meaningless without a close, loving relationship with God. The problem is, we cut ourselves off from God with our sin. By failing to keep God's commandments. By failing to love him and others the way we should. But God took care of that problem when he sent his only Son Jesus into the world. On the cross, Jesus took our sins upon himself and assumed all our guilt. He suffered the punishment that we deserve. And then he rose to show us he is the way. The way to God. By relying on Jesus' work and love, we have all the treasures of heaven. We gain adoption as God's children, we become citizens of heaven, we have peace with God and the privilege of prayer. The list goes on and on. Because of Jesus, God richly supplies all our needs of body and soul. We have no need. No reason to steal.

I suspect we all like to think that we keep the Seventh Commandment pretty well. The truth is, though, temptations to break the Seventh Commandment are great. Even though we have more than enough stuff, we feel a pull to use deception to make a sale, to cheat on taxes, withhold our offerings and gifts to the Lord. When it comes to helping

our neighbors improve and protect their property and possessions, we shy away. We kind of feel like that's their business. And so I pray that God's Word and Holy Spirit would wake us up to recognize and overcome these temptations. To pray sincerely and with deep conviction the words of today's collect (I invited the congregation to read the collect with me and concluded the sermon).

Sermon Preached on September 13-14, 2008
The Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost
“Forgiven and Forgiving”
Matt. 18:21-25

(All humorous elements are italicized)
Matt. 18:21-35

Dear Friends in Christ,

About 20 years ago, while I was leading a service at the local nursing home, I witnessed two elderly residents bickering. They were fighting pretty bitterly over which one would sit next to the piano. It also appeared that they had done this a few times before. The program director, who was a very sweet middle-aged woman, tried to calm them down by saying, “Listen, you two. You need to forgive each other. You’re both Christians and you’re going to spend eternity with each other in heaven.” *To which one resident replied, “Well, if she’s going to be in heaven, I don’t want to go there.”*

What’s your reaction to that? It sounds like something two 5-year-olds would say to each other, right? It sounds a little funny coming from the mouths of two eighty-year-old women. But it also seems very sad. A little tragic. Here were two Christians who had experienced the cleansing power of Jesus’ love. They had the same faith, the same Lord, the same baptism. They were sisters in God’s family. Yet they didn’t want to forgive each other. Granted, we all lose it from time to time. People of all ages become petty from time to time. But the whole scene still seems a bit heart wrenching.

The Christian’s motivation and need to forgive others is the whole point of Jesus’ words in our text today. Having been forgiven their huge debt of sin, Christians freely forgive others. Realizing that we have no chance of peace with God without Christ’s forgiveness and realizing that Jesus forgives us daily and much, we are moved to forgive

others. As I've said many times before, when you think about the magnitude of God's mercy in Christ, when you think about how often Jesus forgives you, forgiving others doesn't seem like such a big deal. It's natural to our new life in Christ! Forgiving others is the way of Christ –and the way of those who belong to him.

Peter thought he was being pretty generous the day he approached Jesus and asked, “Lord, how often shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?” Seven times. That's a lot. Plenty of opportunity for a guy to change his ways. A guy who sinned against you more than seven times didn't deserve forgiveness. But then Jesus dropped a bombshell. He told Peter, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy times seven.” “Peter, I don't want to you keep count of the times your brother has wronged you. Just forgive. Because you belong to me, always forgive.”

Always forgive. That's mind boggling, isn't it? Can you really forgive that often? Can your life be marked by a forgiving heart? A lot of people don't think so. A lot of people have been influenced to withhold forgiveness in our revenge saturated culture. If you google the word “revenge” on your computer, you'll find a whole bunch of websites dedicated to helping you get revenge. *There's “RevengeLady.com,” and “The Revenge Guy,” and “payback.com.” The logo for “payback.com” reads “Revenge at its best.”* “RevengeLady.com.” lists ten rules for getting revenge. Some of them are: “Get mad...then get even.” “Revenge is healthy. Don't listen to those mealymouths who tell you otherwise.” “Always aim your revenge where it hurts the most. Go right for the jugular.” “If you do something you're not proud of, be sure to cover your tracks well.” *This website also has a link for voodoo dolls and curses.*

One website listed ten real life revenge stories. In one of them, a woman became angry with one of her friends at a barbecue. They got into a disagreement about the barbecue and this lady stomped off. Later, she smeared the entrails and oil of a dead skunk on her friend's car! *I'm thinking, "Lady, if you don't want pickles on your hamburger, just tell your friend. Don't wreck her car!"* Our culture views revenge as healthy. As a sign of strength.

But our God calls us to forgive. Forgiveness means you give up the intent and desire to hurt others for hurting you. You give up the right—or what the world perceives to be a right—to hurt others for hurting you. Instead of returning evil with evil, wrong with wrong, hurt with hurt, you're kind and loving to those who sin against you. God doesn't say you have to trust them. He doesn't say you have to be their doormat. But we should want the best for those people. We should ask God to do whatever it takes to get through to them, so that they have a blessed life.

The patriarch Joseph knew about forgiving others. When he was a young man, his brothers hated him. They hated him so much, they attacked him, put him in a pit, and sold him into slavery in Egypt. While in Egypt, Joseph went through some hard knocks. Although he was a faithful and useful servant to his Egyptian master, he was falsely accused of attempted rape and thrown in prison. He languished there for some time—until his ability to interpret dreams brought him to the attention of Pharaoh. Once he began to work for Pharaoh, the land of Egypt prospered and Joseph became second in command in all of Egypt. Under his direction, Egypt had plenty of food even during a severe famine that affected all the countries in that area of the world.

That's why Joseph's brothers went to Egypt. They needed food for their flocks and families, so they went to Egypt to buy some. When they approached Joseph for help, he recognized them immediately. But they didn't recognize them –I'm sure they thought he was long dead. When he revealed himself to them, they were frightened. *You know, I like to measure fear on a scale based on the fear I experienced as a child watching "The Wizard of Oz." Remember that movie, the one with Judy Garland? It was shown once a year when I was a kid and it was a great movie. Very creative and suspenseful. I loved it. But there were parts that were very scary for a 7-year-old. The poison poppies that made the characters sleepy. The haunted woods that surrounded that wicked witch's castle. But the scariest part –the scariest part was the flying monkeys! I about swallowed my gum when I saw those monkeys. C'mon. Be honest. Didn't those monkeys scare you?* Well, take that childish fear of the flying monkeys and multiply it by 100 times. That's how Joseph's brothers must have felt when they learned that Joseph was alive. Not only was he alive, he was second in command in Egypt.

They were scared to death. They were sure that Joseph would feed them to the crocodiles. They deserved it! After all, they had done the unthinkable. But Joseph forgave them. Instead of returning evil with evil, he gave them food and protection and a place to live. He wanted the best for them. More than that, God used Joseph to bring his brothers to repentance and a renewed faith in the Lord. God restored that family! And without forgiveness, none of it would have happened.

It's easy to see the benefits of forgiving others. People with forgiving hearts enjoy a rest and peace that others don't have. They don't waste all kinds of time and energy fretting and rehashing old hurts. They don't waste time and energy planning revenge.

They're free of bitterness and resentment –and can concentrate on the important things in life.

A well-known musician once told a news reporter about how his wife had planned her revenge on him for months. He'd been abusing drugs and alcohol for quite a long time and had treated her horribly. But rather than confront his problem, she decided to take revenge. She planned, and schemed, and waited for the right opportunity. One night, when he was fast asleep, she wrapped him in the bed sheet and sewed the ends together. He looked like a big dumpling. When he woke up, he was trapped! Needless to say, that marriage didn't last very long. And you can't help but wonder, "What would have happened if they'd used all that time, energy, and creativity in making a better marriage?" They'd probably still be married today.

Forgiving someone can even benefit the person who's wronged you. A lot of times when people wrong us, it's just a trivial matter. Once in a while a friend might speak a careless word, or your neighbor might forget to return the shovel he borrowed. These are little things that you simply overlook. But sometimes the offense is serious. Sometimes the offense is self-destructive or hurtful to other people. In those cases, you don't just excuse it. You don't just look the other way. No, you talk to the offender so he realizes what he's done. You talk to him so God can work in his life and bring him to repentance. You talk to him so that, with God's help, he can correct that hurtful behavior --so he can get the help he needs to change that behavior. If that person repents, you forgive him. If he doesn't repent, you still forgive him. And then you pray for him, you avoid enabling him, you witness to Christ as the Lord gives you opportunity.

We forgive because God forgives us completely in Christ. That's the whole point of Jesus' parable in our text. The king who forgave his servant's debt, a debt of millions of dollars the servant could never hope to repay, that king represents God. Like the servant, we owe a debt to God we could never hope to repay. We sin every day, if not with our actions, then certainly with our thoughts and words. We fail to love others the way we should. We fail to love God the way we should. For that we should be punished. It's only right. It's only just that we be driven out of God's presence and separated from him forever.

Instead, God decided to send his only begotten Son into the world to live a perfect life of love and be punished for our sins. When Jesus cried out "It is finished!" from the cross, he declared that our debt had been paid. The sins of those who rely on Jesus as Savior are no longer taken into account by God. The ledger is wiped clean. Through faith in Jesus, we have God's love and favor and blessing forever. And so, in view of God's mercy, in view of that forgiven debt, we forgive others. We share God's grace with others.

Let me conclude by asking, "What do you do when you don't feel like forgiving?" Let's say someone has hurt you deeply and your heart isn't in it. Your heart isn't in forgiving him. Well, Jesus tells us to forgive one another from the heart. That's our calling –to forgive with all our being, with all our will and emotions. And so, in difficult cases, forgiveness begins as an act of the will. You make up your mind that you're not going to hurt that person for hurting you. Instead, you're going to be loving and kind to him. You don't have to be his doormat, but you love him. You want the best for him. And then ask the Holy Spirit to change your heart. Ask the Holy Spirit to change your

feelings so that they're in line with your will and God's will. And the Holy Spirit will be at work in you, changing your attitudes, softening your heart –so that you forgive the offender with your heart and mind. Because that's the way God loves and forgives us. Thanks be to God, God loves and forgiveness us with all his being.

Sermon Preached on October 18-19, 2008
The Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost
“Do the Due”
Matt. 22:15-22

(All humorous elements are italicized)
Matt. 22:15-22

Dear Friends in Christ,

One of my all time favorite commercials was shown during a Superbowl game about 8 years ago. In this commercial you see a man chasing a cheetah. The cheetah, as you know, is the fastest animal on the face of the earth. *Incredibly, the man catches up with the cheetah and wrestles it to the ground. He opens the animal’s mouth, pulls out a can of Mountain Dew and says, “Bad cheetah. Get your own.” As he walks away, a deep voice announces, “Do the Dew.”*

“Do the Dew.” That’s a catchy slogan. It’s also the theme of today’s text. Not “Do the Dew,” –D –E –W, but “Do the Due,” –D –U –E. Give people what’s due them. If someone is due money, do the due. Give him the money. If someone is due honor, do the due. Give him the honor. If someone is due service and respect, do the due. Give him your service and respect.

“Do the due” is the point of Jesus’ words in our text. We’re told by Matthew that the Pharisees wanted to trap Jesus in his words. They wanted to get him into trouble by getting him to say something stupid or offensive. And so they asked him, “Teacher, give us your opinion. Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?” Tricky question. If Jesus told them that they should pay taxes to Caesar, they’d accuse him of being disloyal to the Jewish nation. They’d accuse him of siding with the hated Romans. On the other hand, if he told the crowd not to pay taxes, the Herodians, who favored the Roman government

and were present during this exchange, would report him to the Romans. He'd be accused of treason and executed. You see his dilemma? Jesus was between a rock and a hard place.

But Jesus didn't play their game. He foiled their plan by asking for a coin used in paying the tax... (retell story of the text)

Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's. Give Caesar his due. In Jesus' day that meant obeying Roman laws and paying taxes. Although the Romans could be extremely harsh in their punishment of crime, they had an excellent legal system and built sophisticated roads and waters systems. They even had post offices! It took money to build and maintain all this stuff, so the Romans levied taxes. They needed tax money to keep these services going. And so Jesus told the people of his day to give Caesar his due. Pay taxes so Caesar could do his job of governing.

You know what? Jesus' words are as true now as they ever were. God has given us earthly governments to keep order in the world and protect us, and God wants us to give to the government what it needs to get the job done. If roads, services and a police force are to be maintained, the government needs to levy taxes –and we need to pay 'em. That's why St. Paul says in Rom. 13:6, "This is why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes."

You and I are truly blessed to be citizens of the United States. We enjoy liberties and a standard of living that most people in the world can only dream about. *I mean, I could go on and on about the blessings of this country –but I won't because people don't like when I preach for longer than 15 minutes. To be honest, I don't like when I preach*

longer than 15 minutes! (during 10:15 a.m. service: When Pastor Clark first came to Immanuel, I taught him a little trick. To stay awake during long sermons, just put your hand in your pocket and pinch your thigh really hard. Remember that Pastor? You're doing it right now, aren't you?) No, I won't go on and on about all the blessings we enjoy in the U.S. Most of us recognize that we're blessed to live in the United States. So let's render to the government what's due the government. Let's pay our taxes, and vote, and serve on juries and the armed forces when called upon to do so. Let's give the government what it needs to get the job done.

Of course, the second part of Jesus' saying is even more profound because it deals with our relationship with God. Jesus tells us, "Give to God what belongs to God." Give God what's due him. Use what God has given you to serve him and achieve his purposes.

Let God have and use what belongs to him. O.K. That's sounds simple enough. So what in our lives belongs to God? Well –perhaps it would be easier to ask, "What doesn't belong to God?"

The story is told of a scientist who approached a Lutheran pastor and said, "I don't want you to talk about God anymore. I don't want you to mention him at all because science has progressed to the point where we can do anything God ever did. We can clone a man!"

"Alright," the pastor said, "let's see you make a man."

The scientist bent down to pick up a handful of dirt, but the pastor touched his arm to restrain him.

"Not so fast," the pastor said, "Use your own dirt."

Brothers and sisters, God made it all. The dirt, the sea, the sky. Birds, animals, human beings. Everything we have and are, everything we shall be, is from the Lord. God created us --and gave his one and only Son Jesus to redeem us. God has given us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus. We belong to him.

Pastor Eichoff, the pastor who confirmed me, told a wonderful story illustrating how we belong to God. *I know I've told this story twice before, but hey, I've been here at Immanuel for over 12 years. And I'm over 50. So I'm bound to repeat myself a couple times.* So here goes. The story is told of a small boy who built himself a toy sailboat. He lovingly glued the pieces together, sanded it and painted it. He even rigged it with a tiny sail. Not long after he completed the boat, he took it down to a local port to see how well it would float. He put it in a lake. The boat floated beautifully --like a real sailboat! The little boy was thrilled as he watched the boat float along. But after a few minutes the boat floated away from him, to the other side of the lake. He ran to the other side, but when he got there couldn't find his boat. He looked and looked, and searched and searched --but no boat. He went home a very unhappy young man.

About a week later, he was walking past a pawnshop, and there in the window the little boy saw his boat --and it was for sale. He ran home and got all the money he had in his piggy bank. All the money he had in the world. He went back to the pawnshop and bought his boat. It cost him every cent he had, but he didn't care. He wanted his boat. As he walked home, he cradled the boat in his arms and said, "Little boat, I made you. And I bought you back. You belong to me."

Brothers and sisters, it's in this sense that we belong to God. We belong to him totally! Jesus made us. He created us body and spirit, created us as unique human

beings. But our sinfulness caused a rift between our Creator and us. We drifted away from him. And so Jesus bought us back at a tremendous price. By taking our sins upon himself and dying on a cross. Jesus could have let us go. He could have said, "Mankind can go to blazes. They've never done anything for me! They're too much trouble -I'll just create a new world." Instead he said, "I love those I've created. I made them and I bought them back. They belong to me."

Give God his due. Give him what belong to him. Give him your life. That means living in such a way that honors and glorifies God. That means making God the object of our love and worship. Because we belong to God, we consciously live according to God's Word. The guiding principle of our lives isn't, "What's in it for me?" or "I'm gonna do what feels good." The guiding principle of our lives is, "How does God want me to live?" "Are my actions and attitudes in accord with God's Word?"

And we worship. We worship the Lord. You know, we Lutherans are known for emphasizing the truth that God ministers to us when we worship. God builds us up and ministers to us as we hear the Word of God in church. He builds our faith when we take Holy Communion, when we hear the Word of God in the liturgy and in hymns. But worship is also God's due. God's deserves it! The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit deserve every note we sing, every praise we speak, every prayer we utter. Worship is rendering to God the things that are God's.

And you don't have to be a professional church worker to bring glory to God in your daily life. A couple of years ago I heard an older gentleman talk about his days on an auto assembly line in Detroit. He was working with a new man, someone he'd never

met. After working for just two hours, he co-worker said to him, "You're a Christian, aren't you? The man replied, "Why do you say that?"

"Well, I haven't heard you curse even once. And you seem so happy. And I think I heard you humming a hymn."

The older gentleman said that that was the greatest compliment anyone had ever given him.

Still later he was reading his Bible during his free time. Some of his co-workers told him not to do it. They said the boss would tell him to put the Bible away. But the man replied, "Well, I do my job well and this is my free time, so I'm gonna keep reading."

Sure enough, his boss spotted him reading the Bible. He went up to him and said, "You know, this plant would be a much better place --if more people did what you're doing."

That Christian gave God his due. He gave God glory and honor.

It's not easy, is it? We want to do the right thing, we want to give God glory and honor him, but we still sin. We struggle with selfishness and pettiness every day. So how can sinful people give God his due? How can we glorify God when our lives fall short of God's glory?

In a word: Honesty. We've got to let people know that while the Christian's lifestyle is different from that of the world, a different lifestyle isn't the essence of Christianity. The essence of Christianity, the heart of Christianity, is faith in Jesus. We Christians aren't perfect, but we are forgiven because of Jesus' death and resurrection. It's all about Christ and relying on him. We trust Jesus because he's so trustworthy. He gave everything to us, and so we give our lives to him.

Brothers and sisters, our lives need to be transparent. We've got to be honest with people and say, "Listen, I'm a sinner. I don't love God the way I should and I struggle to love other people. So often I'm just full of myself. But this I know and trust. Jesus died for my sins and rose to give me new life. Because he did, I belong to him –and that makes all the difference in the world in my life. And you know what? Jesus died for you, too. And he wants to give you new life." Through openness and honesty, we'll give God the glory due him.

The Pharisees in our text wanted to trap Jesus. They planned to twist his words to make him look bad. To make him something he wasn't. Sadly, people still want to do that today. People want to trap Jesus in a box and make him into their sinful image. Gossips want to make him into a gossip. Sexually immoral people want to make him into a sexually immoral person. Greedy people want to make Jesus into a materialist. But Jesus will have none of it. He's not like you and me. You can't make him into your image. He's the one who made you. You're the work of his hands. He's the one who redeemed you from sin, your sinful self, and Satan's grip on you. The blessings you have come from him. You belong to him. So do the due. Render to Caesar what belongs to Caesar. And render to God what belongs to God.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

APPENDIX B QUESTIONNAIRES

HUMOR IN PREACHING QUESTIONNAIRE Immanuel Lutheran Church July 12-13, 2008

1. Self-deprecating humor is used when a speaker pokes fun at himself. Did you notice any examples of self-deprecating humor in today's sermon?

If yes, please describe how self-deprecating humor was used and how it related to the topic of the sermon (What point was the preacher making with his use of humor).

2. Are you comfortable with self-deprecating humor in sermons? Why or why not?

In your opinion, is self-deprecating humor in sermons useful in engaging hearers?

Is self-deprecating humor useful in making sermon points? Why or why not? How does it affect your impression of the speaker?

3. Did you detect any examples of puns or silly names in today's sermon? If yes, how were they used and how did they relate to the topic of the sermon? In other words, what point did the preacher make with his use of puns or silly names?

Generally speaking, do you find puns or silly names in sermons engaging or distracting?

4. Unexpected twists or contrasts in a story (Victor Borge pulling a seatbelt out of his piano bench is a visual example of this) are often humorous. Did you detect anything like this in today's sermon? If yes, please describe it. If possible, please describe how it related to the topic of the sermon.

5. What do you remember most about today's sermon?

Do you feel that the humor in today's sermon helped you remember the points that the pastor was making?

How did humor enhance or detract from the message of today's sermon?

HUMOR IN PREACHING QUESTIONNAIRE
Immanuel Lutheran Church
August 15-17, 2008

1. A speaker engages in physical humor when he makes gestures or movements that evoke laughter. Did you detect any physical humor in today's sermon? If so, please describe it.

Do you remember the point the speaker was trying to make when he used physical humor? If so, please describe it.

Are you comfortable with physical humor in sermons? Why or why not?

2. Exaggeration takes place when people overstate something and stretch the bounds of reality. To say that your packed suitcase feels like "a ton bricks" is an exaggeration. Sometimes speakers exaggerate verbal images or make outrageous statements to evoke laughter.

Did you detect any humorous exaggerations in today's sermon? If so, please describe the exaggeration(s).

If you can recall it, how did the speaker's exaggeration(s) relate to the sermon topic?

In your opinion, do humorous exaggerations distract or engage people as they listen to a sermon?

- 3. Speakers often tell humorous anecdotes, which are true or made up stories, to evoke laughter. Did you notice any humorous anecdotes in today's sermon? (If you did not, please go to question 4) If you did, please describe the anecdote(s).**

If you can remember it, what point was the preacher trying to make by telling the anecdote(s)?

How did the preacher's use of anecdotes affect you?

4. Preachers sometimes use "imported" jokes in sermons. An imported joke is a joke that doesn't relate to the sermon topic at all. Although no imported jokes were told in today's sermon, how helpful do you think they might be in preaching?

In general, how do you feel about imported jokes?

5. What do you remember most about today's sermon and what was most useful to you?

HUMOR IN PREACHING QUESTIONNAIRE
Immanuel Lutheran Church
September 13-14, 2008

1. The speaker mentioned several funny sounding or unusual websites during his sermon. Do you remember why he mentioned these websites? If so, please explain briefly why he mentioned them.

How do you feel about the mention of these websites? Did the reference to websites engage you or distract you?

2. The speaker related a story about a woman who took revenge on a friend. He also added a humorous twist to the story. If you remember the humorous twist, please describe it.

Do you feel that this humorous twist added to or detracted from the sermon?
Please explain in what way it added to or detracted from the sermon.

3. The speaker shared a personal, humorous story about his childhood fears.
If you remember it, please describe it.

Do you remember the point the speaker was trying to make by telling this
personal story? If so, please describe it.

Could you relate to the speaker's personal, humorous story? In what way did it
affect you?

4. Do you remember anything else in the sermon that you found humorous? If so, please describe it.

5. Preachers sometimes use "imported" jokes in sermons. An imported joke is a joke that doesn't relate to the sermon at all. Although no imported jokes were told in today's sermon, how helpful do you think they might be in preaching?

(The last question is on the next page.)

6. What do you remember most about today's sermon?

HUMOR IN PREACHING QUESTIONNAIRE
Immanuel Lutheran Church
October 18-19, 2008

1. There was a play on words using a Mountain Dew slogan at the beginning of today's sermon. If you remember it, please describe it.

If you remember the play on words in today's sermon, please describe how it made you feel. Did you find it engaging or distracting?

In general, how do you feel about puns and using a play on words in sermons?

2. Self-deprecating humor occurs when a speaker makes fun of himself or makes light of himself. In today's sermon the preacher said that he wouldn't go on and on about how blessed we are to live in the United States. He then made fun of himself a little bit. If you can remember it, please describe how he made fun of himself.

Did the preacher's self-deprecating humor lower your opinion of him, raise your opinion of him, or keep it the same? If you can, please explain why it had that effect on you.

In general, do you think self-deprecating humor is helpful in sermons? In your opinion, can it be overdone?

3. The preacher told a humorous story about a scientist and a Lutheran pastor in today's sermon. If you remember it, please describe it.

Do you remember the point the preacher was trying to make by telling this story? If so, please describe it. Did the story reinforce the preacher's point?

4. Do you remember any other humorous elements in today's sermon? If so, please describe them/it.

(Turn page)

5. What do you remember most about today's sermon? What was most meaningful to you?

APPENDIX C QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

HUMOR IN PREACHING QUESTIONNAIRE Immanuel Lutheran Church July 12-13, 2008

1. Self-deprecating humor is used when a speaker pokes fun at himself. Did you notice any examples of self-deprecating humor in today's sermon?

- Yes
- Yes
- Yes
- Yes
- Yes
- Yes
- Yes
- Yes
- Yes
- No
- Yes
- Yes
- Yes

If yes, please describe how self-deprecating humor was used and how it related to the topic of the sermon (What point was the preacher making with his use of humor).

- What name calling can do to an individual
- Your example of Tony Bologna or Tony Macaroni was funny. It brought to mind just how offensive it is to God to have His name used so irrationally.
- Pastor used his own experience as a child (name calling). Be respectful of God's name & don't take it in vain.
- Pastor described being called Tony Bologna & Tony Macaroni. God's name is precious and shouldn't be used in vain.
- Describing the use of a name and the importance of not using it in vain.
- Tony Bologna. Your name use to make fun. It was used to use "God's name in vain." Do not use God's name to lie, decline, etc.
- In using his name in funny and annoying ways showing us how God doesn't like it when we use His name other than calling upon Him in prayer.
- Examples of using "Tony" in a derogatory manner. Oh my, Tony, would you look at that. How it can be insulting to use a name in this manner.

- Tony Bologna and Tony Macaroni. Nicknames may be funny at first, but after a while they degrade the person. The topic of the sermon, commandment II – do not misuse the name of the Lord.
- Tony Bologna and Tony Macaroni. You can have a name & people add to it by giving a nickname or making it rhyme to sound silly at your expense! Usually when you get tagged with a name it doesn't leave you. When speaking of God/Jesus be careful – think not to use the Lord's name in vain. Such as cursing or swearing or to use it carelessly. "What's in a name" is important after all. Relating to God's commandment – you should not misuse the name of the Lord.
- Talking about names people used to call you. When you used your name in place of "God" for an example of how people misuse God's name.

2. Are you comfortable with self-deprecating humor in sermons? Why or why not?

- Yes, to some degree. I think the illustration with your name tonight was fine.
- Yes, it relaxes us and puts us in a more receptive mood.
- Yes, it shows the pastor as a person you can identify with.
- Yes. I think it shows a personal side of the pastor and helps the congregation relate to his experience.
- Yes, as long as it is used in good context.
- Yes, it adds to me "getting it."
- Yes, it is useful in holding attention of the younger as well as the older people in the congregation.
- Usually, if it is kept light-hearted.
- Ok, if it doesn't offend anyone.
- Yes, I believe everyone has been made fun of at one time or another.
- Yes. It can help you understand the topic the pastor is speaking on or help you relate better in relation to yourself with the topic and its point.
- Not when it degrades a person or belittle them. People are not always sure how to take a person or how to respond when people use self-deprecating humor.

In your opinion, is self-deprecating humor in sermons useful in engaging hearers?

- Yes!
- Yes, if it is not used overly much! It shows us our own lack of self confidence & "perks up" our listening.
- Yes, because it's something you can relate to.
- Yes
- Yes
- I think so.
- It breaks up the sermon in a good way. Keeps your attention focused listening to a message hidden in humor.
- Yes, though sometimes I think people in [Lutheran] churches are nervous to laugh out loud. But it keeps people engaged & helps exemplify your point.
- As long as it doesn't offend anyone
- Yes, I believe a laugh gets their interest as to what's next, but the pastor should not be a comedian.
- Yes

- Sometimes it might be used to make a point, but that is not a good way/example for people to think that kind of humor is a good kind to use all the time.

Is self-deprecating humor useful in making sermon points? Why or why not? How does it effect your impression of the speaker?

- Yes! I have always felt that it is better to poke fun at oneself as opposed to others. In my mind it does not change my impression of the speaker.
- Sometimes we get the feeling the speaker is perhaps talking down to us. The humor relaxes us and the speaker seems more "friendly."
- Yes, because it relates what the pastor is saying to things that we have a better understanding of.
- Yes, I think it helps the congregation relate. I think one of Pastor Troup's strengths in making sermons memorable is his ability to relate his life experience in a humorous way.
- Yes. It helps keep us focused. Also makes the audience realize the speaker is human and is humble.
- Yes, it helps me to focus on the point of sermon. He is "comfortable in his own skin."
- It does help in making points. It's more pleasant to sit and listen to the message with it than being talked down to. It lets me know the speaker is human and feels he is not above everyone else.
- Humanizes the pastor. It keeps people engaged and helps exemplify your point.
- It is – may help them to remember
- Yes. My impression of the speaker is that he went through some of the same things that I did.
- Yes. It can make something clearer. It can "make you think." I think it makes a good impression – it is good being able to laugh a little while hearing God's Word in a sermon.
- Maybe – if used occasionally. I think I tend to have a lower opinion of someone who did that all the time. I think they have a lower opinion of themselves.

3. Did you detect any examples of puns or silly names in today's sermon? If yes, how were they used and how did they relate to the topic of the sermon? In other words, what point did the preacher make with his use of puns or silly names?

- Yes. Dan Druff, etc. It shows how a name can affect people's reaction to the person.
- Yes. Tony Macaroni or Tony Bologna are silly and do indicate youth, immaturity and are certainly not related to adulthood
- Yes, names can be disrespectful and hurtful. Do not take the Lord's name in vain.
- Tony Macaroni and Tony Bologna. They were used in making the point that names do matter and can be used to make someone feel good or bad.
- Yes, when you related that they called you Tony Bologna and using names about God in vain, such as cursing and swearing.
- Yes. Call us by our right names, it is important.
- Yes. Making fun of his name in order to show us we need to respect God's name always.
- Tony Bologna. Examples of how you can be hurt/insulted by brutalizing a name.
- No
- The nicknames. If a person does not like his name being misused, you can believe God does not like his name being misused. Kicking one's toe and misusing God's name instead of your own. Point being we should guard the use of God's name.

- Yes. When speaking of God/Jesus be careful – think not to use the Lord’s name in vain. Such as cursing or swearing or to use it carelessly. “What’s in a name” is important after all. Relating to God’s commandment – you should not misuse the name of the Lord.
- Talking about names people used to call you. When you used your name in place of “God” for an example of how people misuse God’s name.

Generally speaking, do you find puns or silly names in sermons engaging or distracting?

- Engaging
- As children, they are or could be engaging. As adults they are no longer so except in very intimate situations.
- Engaging
- I think when used to further the point of the sermon, they are useful.
- No opinion
- Engaging
- I find it engaging. It helps bring reality to the sermon. It makes it more personal.
- Generally, engaging
- No
- I believe they can be both. The key is how much they are used.
- Engaging
- They are usually funny. I like puns (as long as I understand them and it relates to the point).

4. Unexpected twists or contrasts in a story (Victor Borge pulling a seatbelt out of his piano bench is a visual example of this) are often humorous. Did you detect anything like this in today’s sermon? If yes, please describe it. If possible, please describe how it related to the topic of sermon.

- Yes. The reaction of the older gentleman who was in conference with his wife and the Pastor.
- No. If so, I failed to see it.
- No
- No
- Sing out loud and this will encourage others to also sing loud. Praise God with a loud voice.
- Sing out – be loud. If you can’t sing well, that’s ok. The good singers will just sing louder. Come to worship and praise God.
- Making fun of His name brought attention and laughs and helped focus on the message he was sending.
- There was something, but I can’t recall it.
- No
- The man who asked the pastor if it had come to this when the pastor was going to say a prayer for him. This person was reluctant to use God’s name at all. Possibly out of fear of misuse?
- I remember Pastor saying if you stub your toe, you don’t say your own name like “Oh Tony” you tend to say “Oh God” or even curse. This is common to all of us. We need to be aware. Even if we are excited about something or surprised we say “Oh my God!” This shows us how careless we can be with using the Lord’s name in vain.

5. What do you remember most about today's sermon?

- Always be vigilant of how we use God's name. Always to His glory.
- The most important thought is God's Word is holy & never to be used in any way lightly and/or without reverence.
- Not to take the Lord's name in vain
- The importance of using the Lord's name as intended, not in cursing or non-sensical ways.
- To love and respect the Word of God and to honor it and praise God
- The second commandment. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord in vain!
- Respect the name of God at all times and show others to do the same.
- I thought the sermon made a very good point of helping us understand how we might feel if our names were used abusively. Then transferring that to how God feels when we use his name.
- Do not misuse the name of the Lord.
- The title of the sermon "What's in a name?" Its meaning and how you use it does matter. Do not use God's name in vain. It displeases Him.
- That God doesn't like it when we misuse His name carelessly.

Do you feel that the humor in today's sermon helped you remember the points that the pastor was making?

- Yes
- Definitely yes!
- No, because it is one of the commandments.
- Yes, the name illustrations were helpful. Pastor described them as funny at first, but then they became annoying and hurtful.
- Yes
- Yes
- Yes
- Yes
- It helped.
- Yes because it dealt with taking one's name wrongly and God's name in vain.
- I do.
- Yes

How did humor enhance or detract from the message of today's sermon?

- It enhanced because it helps one remember.
- Enhanced it. God's name is never a joke.
- I think it enhanced the sermon because it made people more relaxed and open to the Word.
- I think that it made the point that we should be mindful of names and how they can make someone feel good or bad. This illustrates how we should regard God and the care with which we should address Him.
- Enhanced by drawing attention to the topic in a clear fashion.
- Enhance. It communicated that the name of Jesus is to be respected.
- It did enhance. It makes you think and focus on what is being said by making it enjoyable to listen to.

- I thought humor enhanced this sermon quite a bit.
- It got my attention several times.
- Enhanced. It showed the listeners on their own level that God will not appreciate it.
- The humor makes you laugh then you think about what the Pastor is saying in relation to his topic. You see what point he is trying to get across and how it makes you feel about the topic.
- It got the point across about how casually and unthinkingly people use God's name.

HUMOR IN PREACHING QUESTIONNAIRE

Immanuel Lutheran Church

August 16-17, 2008

1. A speaker engages in physical humor when he makes gestures or movements that evoke laughter. Did you detect any physical humor in today's sermon? If so, please describe it.
 - Pastor asks a member to "stick em up" after Pastor walked down aisle
 - "Stick 'em up" – gun shape with hand, effective
 - Yes. It was nice to hear the congregation laugh and not be serious.
 - Yes. "Stick 'em up"
 - Announcing a hold up to a worshiper
 - Lots of hand gestures. Most notably was the finger gun pointed at Curt and saying "stick 'em up"
 - Yes. When Pastor aimed a finger gun at a member in mock robbery
 - Stick up – Larry Taake
 - Yes. Held his hand like a gun & pointed it at a parishioner
 - Yes. When you used your finger as a gun. Arms spread at the ice box and opened the ice box.
 - "Stick 'em up"
 - Yes. Pastor used his hand as a gun and said "stick 'em up"
 - Stick 'em up. The pastor came up to a person and held him up for his wallet using a finger gun.

Do you remember the point the speaker was trying to make when he used physical humor? If so, please describe it.

- Stealing is not always obvious
- Examples of things just as damaging as physical burglary with a gun. Not needed tests, repairs on a car, real estate falsehoods. Point: "We steal when we cheat people."
- Yes. To not steal from our neighbor or from God
- To describe possibly the most overt concept of stealing. Almost something we think of as silly or something that only happened back in the days of "westerns." Certainly something none of us would be guilty of.
- Taking money, etc. in a wallet that was stolen from another person
- This is what we "normally" think of when we think "Thou shalt not steal."
- The point was that stealing is wrong

- The obvious, stealing
- Armed robbery is what most people think of in reference to “Thou shalt not steal.”
- Yes, the point of a gun representing stealing is the common misconception by people. That a “hold up” is stealing but withholding information, tax evasion, etc. are just as harmful & sinful.
- When we think of stealing, we usually think of armed robbery, burglary, etc.
- Yes. The obvious thought of what “Thou shalt not steal” means
- Yes. This type of stealing is not the only way we steal. Thou shalt not steal.

Are you comfortable with physical humor in sermons? Why or why not?

- Yes, it gets people’s attention and relaxes them so they can concentrate on speaker.
- Yes, adds emotion to the message & helps keep attention of listeners.
- Yes, I think it breaks up everyone being too serious. I enjoyed it.
- It’s fine. Being down the aisle, Pastor was closer to us – certainly an eyegrabber because this is not the norm. It was a good way to grab attention at the start of the sermon.
- Yes. Because it relates to things in our everyday lives.
- Yes. I think it helps catch people’s attention. It can also help set a positive tone. I have heard the pastors “make light” of their own situation and makes them appear to be just like us, sinners in need of salvation.
- Yes. Physical humor has a place in sermons. It helps to make a point, as well as draw attention of members – humor has a tendency to relax people and focus attention – a good thing to encourage listening.
- Yes. Makes one more comfortable
- Yes. Any movement keeps people alert.
- Yes. It adds another dimension to the sermon. It allows us to compare current (modern) sense of humor to older Biblical times.
- Usually – as long as it’s not too outrageous
- Yes. I find it engaging and down to earth.
- Yes. Humor and laughter in sermons help the listeners to feel comfortable about the subject. Once comfortable, they will be more open and receptive to what is actually being said.

2. Exaggeration takes place when people overstate something and stretch the bounds of reality. To say that your packed suitcase feels like “a ton bricks” is an exaggeration. Sometimes speakers exaggerate verbal images or make outrageous statements to evoke laughter.

Did you detect any humorous exaggerations in today’s sermon? If so, please describe the exaggeration(s).

- Asking Curt to “stick ‘em up”
- Do you think I’m blind? – vacancy pastor, “Shoe factory” – for example of all our possessions
- No I did not. It was just enough to get your point across.
- The shoes probably. In reality its probably not an exaggeration, but something fun and easy to joke/tease about – not really offensive to women.
- Yes. Paying taxes that were owed.

- All the food choices in the refrigerator. All the shoes in the closet.
- Several exaggerations were offered in today's sermon. The one about ladies having a shoe store full of shoes in their closets (only slight exaggeration). The one about pastor and his refrigerator full of food and always being comfortable with air conditioning.
- Cheating IRS
- Yes. I think he stated that a house looked like an atomic bomb went off.
- Yes, the one that comes to mind first is the women's shoe closet compared to an atom bomb.
- I don't remember an exaggeration.
- Gem of a car. Starter home.

If you can recall it, how did the speaker's exaggeration(s) relate to the sermon topic?

- All stealing is not obvious and we must be aware of the small, less obvious ways.
- "Do you think I'm blind" – story about kids cheating; eventually, you are caught – God knows what you have done – "You reap what you sew."
- By telling not to steal from God or take for granted what He has given us.
- It really made me feel silly about holding possessions as so important in my life. I will admit, stealing is one of my petty sins – always looking to get something for nothing – justifying myself. Anyway, in reality, God has been so generous and merciful to me.
- This is also stealing, trying to cheat on taxes which is going against the 7th commandment.
- Very well. We are a blessed people. We have all that we need and then some. We don't starve and we have nice homes and enough clothing and shoes for 20+ people.
- God provides us with all we need, and we do not need to steal or covet what others have.
- If you cheat IRS – you are proud?
- I don't really believe so.
- It related the point that we are blessed by God with physical wealth, and we should not be ashamed by this. Rather we should be blessed by giving our physical as well as time to the needy or hungry.
- These are actual real-life exaggerations that people use to cheat others. Cheating is a form of stealing.

In your opinion, do humorous exaggerations distract or engage people as they listen to a sermon?

- Engage
- Engages the audience
- No
- Engage – also the raising of the hands with lending \$ engaged the congregation. See, we have to pay attention to be able to do what we're supposed to do so we don't look bad in front of our peers.
- Engage
- I think they help engage people. It allows you to recognize the truth without great offense.
- I believe they engage people by providing a direct example to our own lives.
- Engage
- Distract – It makes me wonder what would need to happen to make the exaggeration truthful.

- It is engaging to the audience. Again, it gives a personal relationship to the speaker because of our own personal identical conduct with the exaggerations.
 - Engage
 - I think it is engaging.
 - Humorous exaggerations that work well with the topic will engage people to listen. I believe that they help with understanding if done properly. If they do not relate to the sermon, people can easily become distracted from the sermon.
3. Speakers often tell humorous anecdotes, which are true or made up stories, to evoke laughter. Did you notice any humorous anecdotes in today's sermon? (If you did not, please go to question 4.) If you did, please describe the anecdote(s).
- Note to the IRS anecdote. "Shoe factory" – God gives us everything we need. (Humorous anecdote)
 - By telling the man in the pew to give you his wallet. Also about catching the boys cheating.
 - It was difficult to remember for me, had to think. It was about the almost blind vacancy pastor.
 - Yes. Sending money to IRS after not filing taxes as he should. Thus he was stealing and felt guilty.
 - "Stick 'em up," returning \$500, refrigerator, and shoes
 - The one story about the tax cheat who felt so guilty he sent a \$500 check to the IRS (adding that if he continued to feel guilty he would send the rest later).
 - Yes. Man who owed money to IRS felt guilty & sent note & money declaring his guilt. However, he did not make full restitution & his note stated such.
 - Somewhat humorous was the relating of the blind pastor and the children taking advantage. But the new pastor (not blind) said "what, do you think I'm blind" when seeing the children cheat.
 - The story was about a man who felt guilty for cheating on his taxes. He wrote a letter to the IRS and sent them \$500. He stated that if the guilt would continue, he would send more money.

If you can remember it, what point was the preacher trying to make by telling the anecdote(s)?

- That stealing is not always obvious to us.
- Talking about guilt for wrongdoing, and God gives us what we need.
- Always be thankful for what you have and to give back, not to take, what does not belong to you.
- It was about cheating. When I cheat, most of the time I don't think it's a big deal.
- Give to God what is God's and give to government, etc. what is owed.
- If we steal and wish to make it right, we must return it all. We have enough for 20 people's needs.
- That even simple seemingly small acts of dishonesty are stealing and wrong in the eyes of the Lord.
- Sometimes we may feel guilty, but we don't always completely make up for it in our behavior.
- The subtle ways that we steal everyday.
- Not being honest is a form of cheating which in turn is a way to steal.

How did the preacher's use of anecdotes affect you?

- I saw that I have "stolen" in the past, and I didn't think of it as "stealing."
- Responsive laughter – helps make point
- I really enjoyed them. It helped me understand things better.
- It reminded me that God knows/sees everything so I'm not getting away with anything. God sees me cheating/sinning.
- Always be honest!
- We are truly blessed, and I should make sure I share these blessings better.
- The anecdotes help me relate the message to my life. They keep my attention focused on the sermon. They relax and encourage listening.
- It made me think "Why bother admitting it – if you're not going to be completely truthful and make it right 100%?"
- Things to consider about what stealing really means, obvious and subtle.
- It reminded me that not stealing from your neighbor is not limited to people. It includes organizations.

4. Preachers sometimes use "imported" jokes in sermons. An imported joke is a joke that doesn't relate to the sermon topic at all. Although no imported jokes were told in today's sermon, how helpful do you think they might be in preaching?

- Somewhat helpful. They get people "warmed up."
- Many speakers use imported jokes to open up conversation, break tensions, and get people's attention.
- To make things real
- I don't think they are helpful.
- Ok
- I feel that the jokes should relate to the sermon topic. It should fit under the "law" or "gospel" portion.
- An imported joke may be appropriate to begin a sermon, but if it doesn't help to convey the message, then it is distracting and unhelpful.
- Tough question. A joke would likely liven the crowd, but that's the only way it might be helpful.
- It's not too bad as a kind of opening or start sometimes.
- It might get a person's attention.
- A way to get attention and bring the sermon more "down to earth."
- Jokes used in a sermon are there to entertain. With new generations, entertainment is very important. Because of that, they may help with younger people actively following the sermon. For my generation and older generations, the jokes do not add to the sermon. (In my opinion)

In general, how do you feel about imported jokes?

- A few are okay
- Good ice breakers with some audiences/meetings
- I do think it is a good thing.
- That they are distracting. If they relate to the sermon, they put us on the right track. If not, it gets us unfocused.
- I enjoy humor, if not overdone.

- I think the whole sermon should relate to the topic of the week. Why tell it if it does not relate?
- An imported joke may be appropriate to begin a sermon, but if it doesn't help to convey the message, then it is distracting and unhelpful.
- Ok
- Only needed when a conversation is slowing. Not really needed in any other situation.
- Be careful. Occasional imported jokes can relax and prepare people for the start of a meeting or sermon, but in general I feel they are "cheap" and lend no sustenance to the material.
- I'd be concerned that people would remember that and not the point.
- If used correctly, but not overly, it is a good strategy.
- They can be a distraction if not done well and in good taste.

5. What do you remember most about today's sermon and what was most useful to you?

- That we cheat without being aware and must be reminded and thoughtful.
- Physical gestures and humor keep the audience engaged. The message delivered with points and anecdotes people retain better than a long monologue of unbroken verbal orations. People's minds will wander to anything else if they are not "interrupted" with gestures, humor, examples, etc. The opening with the "stick up" of Curt will be retained & therefore the message will be too.
- That God is always here for me and not to take anything for granted. God loves us and forgives us. He wants us to give back when you can.
- With any commandment, sometimes they are taken literally and one might think they are not breaking them. In fact, we break them in many ways everyday. This series is good to remind us all of that. I'm good with that. I don't quite understand why it goes so far as to say we need to support our neighbors. Our society today is so much just to support ourselves. The taxes thing – one today is looked up upon if they are frugal or "smart" with taxes to save money and not have to pay as much. Companies advertise this. I continue to deal with difficult things in my life right now. It reminded me that as God richly blesses me with material things – all that I need plus more – He also will sustain me spiritually if I let him. To give me the strength to do for me what I cannot do for myself. It reminds me to look at only my life and my things – not to compare myself with someone else. This may make me feel sorry for myself if I don't have what they have.
- We are truly blessed, and we need to share that better and not take what is not ours.
- That cheating is dishonest and is stealing. That while we may get away with cheating or stealing. God knows what we have done and what is in our hearts.
- We all steal and are deceitful. We try to get away with things by withholding the truth, etc. We don't need to steal, God provides all.
- Reference to women's desire for a lot of shoes. Reminds me that most people I know have MUCH more than they need. They have most all they want.
- Story about blind pastor
- In every corner of our lives, we need to let God in. To keep us from being led astray by the multiple temptations to shade the truth, especially as related to stealing – cheating the government (and therefore our neighbor) by not paying taxes, cheating God by not giving Him his due, etc.
- Speaking of taxes and how people cheat. This is almost an acceptable form of behavior. Almost a rebellious kind of hero. Society really does need to remember to render unto Caesar what is Caesar's or, luckily for our society, vote for a different way.

- Stealing can be done on multiple levels. We need to be aware of our thoughts and actions and how they impact those around us. Our actions of dishonesty no matter how small are never justified. Sermons that remind us to do what is right in the eyes of God and in our own hearts are important to me.

HUMOR IN PREACHING QUESTIONNAIRE

Immanuel Lutheran Church

September 13-14, 2008

1. The speaker mentioned several funny sounding or unusual websites during his sermon. Do you remember why he mentioned these websites? If so, please explain briefly why he mentioned them.

- Definition of revenge
- To show that there are websites for people who don't want to forgive their fellow men and want to get even.
- We should not return hatred for hatred but love the person who hates you.
- Revenge, payback. In order to get the point across that revenge is more prevalent than forgiveness in today's society.
- Yes. It's about revenge.
- Websites were about revenge and all the different ways it explained about getting revenge.
- They are revenge websites. To show us that we are in a non-forgiving culture.
- They related to sites with ways to get revenge.
- These websites were to get revenge if someone does something against you.
- They had to do with Google searches for the word "revenge."
- To show how someone could get revenge. Not good.
- The websites were how to get even.
- He brought up the websites to show how people these days will use anything on the internet. www.revenge.com, www.payback.com
- The word "revenge" was queried. The impression was the numerous sites dealing with getting revenge when someone hurts you or makes you mad.
- To explain why revenge is so "readily available" to us today. For those seeking revenge – to give them ideas.

How do you feel about the mention of these websites? Did the reference to websites engage you or distract you?

- Interesting, at the time not sure where he was going giving these sites, so I would say this engaged me.
- It shows me that we are all sinful and it is human to not forgive. We need to learn to forgive.
- They were good examples of how we should treat our neighbor who does evil to us. It engaged me.

- Engaging, because the internet is a big part of our lives and it shows a lot of research was done.
- It was interesting to hear about the websites yet scary. It engaged me.
- It's scary to know these websites contain such violent actions. Engaged me to the point of not knowing such websites exist.
- It was interesting because I didn't know that they existed.
- No, it drew together the importance of forgiving and shows how strong revenge can be.
- Engage me, makes me wonder how awful this world is.
- Feel: Intrigued – didn't know they were there and never looked. Engaged.
- Engaged – also put in file to never use them
- It showed how we forget to forgive and hold on to hate
- These websites are disgusting.
- So-so. Our world is tuned in to the internet – we Google about everything. The references would get the hearer's attention. I especially was concerned that people would look for ways to get revenge.
- Applicable – they were engaging only discouraging that they exist!

2. The speaker related a story about a woman who took revenge on a friend. He also added a humorous twist to the story. If you remember the humorous twist, please describe it.

- The woman smeared her friend's car with a dead skunk. Pastor said "Oooohhh! Oooohhh!" in a funny tone.
- The ladies were mad at each other. One had said if one was going to heaven then she was not going.
- The one woman wanted to get revenge and so she put a dead skunk and its entrails on the car of the woman she had a run in with.
- The nursing home story between the two 80-year old ladies who talked of going to heaven. If one was going to be there, the other didn't want to be.
- Two ladies in the nursing home arguing about who is going to sit by the piano. The only lady said if she's (the other lady) going to heaven I don't want to go.
- The story was about the two ladies in the nursing home, both wanting to sit by the piano and arguing about it. The twist was the one lady said if she is going to heaven then I do not want to be there.
- The women only needed to ask for no pickles.
- She spread skunk "perfume" on her friend's car as revenge. (not too funny!)
- The twist was "if she goes to heaven then I don't want to be there."
- If you don't want pickles on your hamburger just say so, don't destroy the car.
- Sewing up her husband in bed cloths.
- If one went to heaven, the other didn't want to go.
- While her partner was sleeping, she sewed him in a bed sheet. "He looked like a great dumpling."
- She rubbed skunk entrails all over the friend's car.

Do you feel that this humorous twist added to or detracted from the sermon? Please explain in what way it added to or detracted from the sermon.

- I think this added to the sermon as an attention getter.
- It added. It is human. We don't like to forgive our enemies. We must learn what Jesus did for us so God could give us our heavenly home.

- It added. Humor is good in any sermon. I think people definitely enjoy it. The laughter shows it.
- Added, especially relating it to five year olds.
- Added. This reminded me of my feelings that I sometimes have, and it taught me to forgive how I feel towards that person or the incident.
- It added to the sermon. Because each woman was acting so childish and the worker indicated they are both Christians and to forgive. This is something we need to remember to do in our every day lives—forgive.
- Added to it, reinforced how unaware we are of our own sin.
- It was a little more “gross” than usual, but still, it shows the length some people go to get revenge. It also shows how it looks to other people and why we need to dig deeper to forgive.
- Added to it. Just shows that people think this way and helps us to relate.
- Added to – All stories have an ending, funny is always good.
- It added. Makes you think.
- It really showed how much people hold grudges.
- I totally enjoyed the twist.
- Personally, I could have left it out or substituted another. (Didn’t find it that humorous.)
- It added to it. It certainly showed how far some people are willing to go for revenge.

3. The speaker shared a personal, humorous story about his childhood fears. If you remember it, please describe it.

- I don’t remember the specifics. I am completing this 24 hours after the sermon. I do remember he made a reference to himself.
- He told us about the movie “Wizard of Oz.” Monkeys and the haunted forest. He was seven years old, and it made him afraid.
- He described about the Wizard of Oz story and about the flying monkeys – how scary it was.
- Talked about a movie and Judy Garland with flying monkeys. (Did not hear the title.)
- The movie the Wizard of Oz. He was afraid of the poison poppies, the haunted woods but most of all the flying monkeys.
- The movie was the Wizard of Oz. The three things he mentioned was poison poppies, haunted woods, and the flying monkeys.
- Wizard of Oz movie and the flying monkeys scared Pastor.
- Totally can relate to the flying monkeys! Many children have been frightened by them for many years.
- Pastor feared the Wizard of Oz movie. Three parts in particular, by the flying monkeys the most.
- Wizard of Oz – flying monkeys and poppy flowers.
- Wizard of Oz, the scary things in the woods
- Watching at seven years old the Wizard of Oz
- He, like me, was afraid of the Wizard of Oz. I also hated seeing the flying monkeys, use to hide my face in pillow till scene was over. Also afraid of poppies and forest.
- Watching the Wizard of Oz every year on TV. Some scenes were scary for a seven year old – the poison poppies, the woods, the flying monkeys. (Almost swallowed his gum). Sie Mine was King Kong!
- The Wizard of Oz and the scary scenes – the poppies, the haunted woods, and the monkeys! (The monkeys scare everyone – even me at 33!)

Do you remember the point the speaker was trying to make by telling this personal story? If so, please describe it.

- We all have fears.
- We all have fears.
- Being age 7, he was scared of this movie.
- The impact this movie made on him as a seven year old boy. How it scared him.
- No
- How fears stay with you. How they affect you. How the feeling of revenge and not wanting to forgive someone can be strong. How these feelings need to be overcome and forgiveness be given.
- If they flying monkeys scared him, multiply that fear by 100 to describe the fear the people had of Joseph.
- Fear that the brothers were feeling – had to have been 100 times worse than fear of the monkeys.
- Don't be jealous – forgive everyone.
- How he got scared and fear.
- God helps us overcome our fears.
- The Old Testament story of Joseph and his brothers during the famine. When they came to Pharaoh's ruler to ask for food and discovered the ruler was their brother whom they sold into slavery. They were fearful of what "revenge" he might have on them.
- The fears Joseph's brothers had at what Joseph might do to them after what they had done to him.

Could you relate to the speaker's personal, humorous story? In what way did it affect you?

- It shows that we all have fears, and, when we grow up, we need to overcome them.
- We are to forgive others as God has forgiven our sins.
- Yes, I understood and could relate to the story about funny things bringing about fear.
- Yes. Right now there are many things going on in my life that I am afraid of.
- Yes I could. As he was telling the story, I was thinking how the flying monkeys scared me before he even mentioned it.
- No
- Took me right back to my watching it the first time. The monkeys were creepy as a young child! (And they did it all without super technology!)
- I am very afraid of the exact things he was.
- Yes – brought back memories of the Wizard of Oz
- It brings to mind that we all have things in life that we fear and want to get even.
- Yes, brought back memories.
- You can always use a familiar movie, story, subject, or song to get the "hearer's" attention. The familiar story does bring back memories (sometimes the memories will take you back to other thoughts and be a distraction by keeping you too long in those thoughts). In this particular story, I could relate that feeling of surprise/fear for the future – what could happen next. So what sweet blessing to know that your fears disappear in that word of forgiveness – grace and mercy!
- Yes – the Wizard of Oz was on only once a year when I was a kid. The monkeys scared me. My mom tells me that they scared her too.

4. Do you remember anything else in the sermon that you found humorous? If so, please describe it.

- No
- I found that the lights going out made the sermon more human.
- The story of how she wrapped the person in a bed sheet and sewed it shut.
- The woman who got revenge by smearing a skunk on a car. It was odd and a little funny.
- I can't remember.
- I can't remember.
- No
- Getting mad at the BBQ, pickles on the sandwich.
- Nursing home ladies dispute, sewing sheets together on husband.
- The lights went out, and he had to speak in the dark.
- I always enjoy when you use a little personal info, most of the time, since we are close in age because I can relate.
- Well, I did think that the two older ladies fighting over the spot by the piano was humorous – the comment about if she is going to heaven then “I don't want to go there” – she wanted the last word. Many things we say in anger are quite “humorous.” Also, just the look you had when the lights flickered at the beginning of your sermon. We all laughed about that.
- The comment at the beginning about the nursing home residents, humorous but disappointing!

5. Preachers sometimes use “imported” jokes in sermons. An imported joke is a joke that doesn't relate to the sermon at all. Although no imported jokes were told in today's sermon, how helpful do you think they might be in preaching?

- I think it is good to have humor. It “wakes up” the sermon and makes me listen harder for the next possible funny line.
- I don't think we would need them.
- Laughter is good any time.
- I enjoy your jokes, so if you ever have used them then I thought of them as your own.
- It gets the attention of the congregation and is more apt to hold their attention.
- Starting a sermon with an imported joke can engage the congregation, and they may pay closer attention.
- May be a good opener.
- I like when you use humor in your sermons. I think it lightens things up and allows people to relate more – kind of draws them in if they weren't listening (so to speak). I do think it's better if it somehow relates either to the sermon or to something relative to that particular day (i.e. lights out, storms).
- Not really helpful personally. If it doesn't relate I personally wouldn't remember it.
- I think it is a good way to open.
- Very helpful. With humor people listen better and get engaged in the subject.
- Depends if a pause is needed.
- I'm not sure.
- The same idea of “familiarity” to get attention or make people more comfortable works with imported jokes.

- I think they can be very helpful. Sometimes they allow us to remember the point that was being made. They also can be an avenue for us sharing Scripture with others. If we tell the joke we can also relate the Scripture it was used in conjunction with it.

6. What do you remember most about today's sermon?

- The talk about the revenge websites and the list of how "to get revenge."
- We all should forgive our friends and enemies. We need to forgive.
- The lesson that we learned is that we are to forgive and forget the sins others have done to us. We must do this because God has forgiven all of our sins.
- We need to forgive with our heart and if we can't continue to forgive, try our best. Forgiveness is always a better choice than revenge. Revenge should not be on our minds.
- Forgiving others who have sinned against you, made you feel bad, or hurt your feelings.
- Forgiving others when it hurts – from the mind, will and heart. We all need to learn how to forgive.
- Forgive because Jesus tells us to do it, not because we feel like it. Forgiving is good for us.
- Forgive not only with your mind, but also with your heart. (And the flying monkeys!)
- That no matter what someone does to you, do not seek revenge but forgive that person even if he doesn't repent. Also that God forgives us, so we are forgiven.
- Forgive no matter what. Don't use revenge.
- Forgiveness. God is a magnitude of mercy.
- No matter how much we would like to get even, we should be like God and forgive in our hearts like he forgives us without merit.
- God forgives and so should we. I enjoyed the little jokes you used in the sermon, especially the two women with the one who didn't want to go to heaven if the other would be there.
- It was preached without lights and electricity. Thank you for a clear presence of mind to continue on without a fluster. The most important reminder is that God has given that perfect forgiveness in sending His Son, Christ Jesus. Looking at our petty grudges and thoughts of revenge are so trivial and sinful. Praise be to God for His mercy and grace to all believers.
- That forgiveness is the natural Christian response since we have been forgiven. Jesus was the best example of forgiveness we have. Excellent message!

HUMOR IN PREACHING QUESTIONNAIRE

Immanuel Lutheran Church

October 18-19, 2008

1. There was a play on words using a Mountain Dew slogan at the beginning of today's sermon. If you remember it, please describe it.
 - Cheetah & runner. Runner catches cheetah and says "silly cheetah, get your own Dew." Do the Dew!
 - TV Commercial urges us "to do the Dew." Jesus urges us to "do the Due." Jesus used such ways of teaching favorable preaching to prove a point.
 - A man was chasing a cheetah, one of the fastest animals on earth, and the man caught it. He opened he cheetah's mouth, pulled out a Mountain Dew, and said "Bad Cheetah!" A deep voice said "Do the Dew."
 - It began with a Cheetah who swallowed a can of Mountain Dew. Compare that to the lesson to "do the Due."
 - Do the Dew – commercial. Bad breath from animal I think is what the commercial was referring to.
 - Do the Dew – meaning respect others. Give them the respect and consideration they are due.
 - Super Bowl commercial – "Do the Dew"
 - "Do the Dew" segued into "Do the Due" for the Lord.
 - Do the Dew – Do the Due (\$ due) – Due the Do (owed respect)
 - The commercial said "Do the Dew." We need to "Do the Due," pay what is due to people – pay taxes, respect others, worship God.
 - "Do the Due" – give what is doe to others
 - For a Super Bowl commercial, a man was chasing a cheetah with a can of Mountain Dew in his mouth. He pulled the can out of the cheetah's mouth and said, "Bad Cheetah." He wasn't bad, just doing what animals do.

If you remember the play on words in today's sermon, please describe how it made you feel. Did you find it engaging or distracting?

- Somewhat, pulls you in and sets up the sermon.
- Felt pleased with it. The boy and his boat which he lost, later saw it at a pawn shop, bought it back. We were lost, Christ bought us back.
- It made me think. It was funny, and I found it engaging not distracting.
- I compared it to what I have often heard "give credit where credit is due." I often question myself as to whether I give thanks to the Lord for his greatness. This was an interesting reminder of that.

- I had trouble with connecting it to the message. Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.
- I found it engaging because it makes you think and you can relate to this.
- Do the Do. Do what belongs to God.
- I enjoyed the fitting together of a popular phrase into how we should be toward God. It was definitely engaging.
- Engaging. It got things going on a roll. It made me listen to know which do/due was being discussed.
- It made me think if I am "paying/doing my dues." It was engaging because it made me think about what I should do – respect better, worship better.
- Found it engaging. The repetition of the phrases/words help reinforce the message.
- Engaging. We should give the Lord what is due Him. Whatever God wants us to do? Worship Him, listen to His Word, partake in the Sacraments, lead our daily lives as a Christian.

In general, how do you feel about puns and using a play on words in sermons?

- Keeps it a little more interesting.
 - Attracts people's attention
 - Sermons are made interesting by some humor.
 - I believe that puns and plays on words help people relate the lesson in play to their own lives more readily.
 - I think sometimes people make the connection if it is explained. Sometimes it helps us to remember when we hear that pun again outside the church which is good.
 - I think it is wonderful to use these things in sermons. I believe people relate to these types of comments, and it is very healthy to laugh. I believe people will listen closer to what is being discussed. Personally, I like humor and stories!
 - It makes sense comparing everyday like experiences to the Bible.
 - Laughter is the best medicine. I think people pay more attention when there is an association between secular things and spiritual. I like humor!
 - I think it helps to grab wandering minds back on track and listening intent increases.
 - I thought it was good. We so often do overlook the important things in life, most of them are easy. It also helps compare sermons to daily life.
 - I like it. Helps me recall important pieces of the sermon through the work week.
 - They enhance the sermon. The congregation can also relate to a lot of them. I think it is very important to relate everyday experience and stories to Scripture reading. It generates interest in the sermon.
2. Self-deprecating humor occurs when a speaker makes fun of himself or makes light of himself. In today's sermon the preacher said that he wouldn't go on and on about how blessed we are to live in the United States. He then made fun of himself a little bit. If you can remember it, please describe how he made fun of himself.
- A long sermon – no one likes that. Looking at watch when preaching if it is over 15 minutes.
 - Let God have what belongs to Him. God has made all things. Wait a minute, you have to bring your own dirt.
 - He talked about his sermons not exceeding 15 minutes and how he didn't want people to be bored or go to sleep. A hint he gave was to pinch one's leg.

- He mentioned how he really likes to keep his sermons to 15 minutes and the congregation probably doesn't want to listen any longer also.
- I do not remember the humor part about himself.
- He said no one likes a sermon longer than 15 minutes, not even pastor.
- He said when Pastor Clark came to Immanuel he told him how to stay awake during sermons, by keeping his hand in pocket and pinching himself.
- No one likes it when the speaker rambles on and on, the mind clicks off. Even pinching yourself to keep awake, if you are awake enough to remember to do it.
- If his sermon goes more than 15 minutes people start to get sleepy and even he starts looking at his own watch. He taught Pastor Clark to put his hand in his pocket and pinch his thigh real hard during long sermons to help stay alert.
- I do not recall how you made fun of yourself.
- Described how sermons can go too long and the audience can get bored. Gave the tip of putting hand in pocket and pinching leg to stay awake.
- He spoke about how a sermon should not go over 15 minutes. He said he does not like to go over 15 minutes when he is speaking. He restated how he told Pastor Clark to pinch himself if he felt sleepy.

Did the preacher's self-deprecating humor lower your opinion of him, raise your opinion of him, or keep it the same? If you can, please explain why it had that effect on you.

- Didn't do either. When I hear of people of other religions going to church all day or hours, occasionally I admire that. Sometimes ours is too short; however, growing up my family fussed if church was over.
- Better to be humble than proud. OK to use.
- It kept it the same, which is that my husband and I are finding the sermons very, very interesting.
- My reaction is that as long as the sermon is interesting, I don't notice the time.
- Because I don't remember this point, I want to say that this type of self-deprecating humor normally makes me think that the pastor is human also and we all are okay.
- My opinion is the same as I have always respected and appreciated Pastor Troup. I believe the humor just reminds us that he is human just like us.
- Keep it the same.
- I think the self-deprecating humor was not over done. Definitely did not lower my opinion of you! I'm from the old school that holds ministers in high regard.
- Kept the same, but again kept the interest in the sermon. We are all human. Maybe next time I will try that trick at a long seminar.
- No, raised my opinion that the Pastor was approachable and "down to earth." I can relate his words to my everyday life.
- Raises my opinion of him. People should be able to make fun of themselves. It is humbling. I believe we can all appreciate ourselves more when we can make fun of ourselves.

In general, do you think self-deprecating humor is helpful in sermons? In your opinion, can it be overdone?

- It makes the pastor more "human" and capable of error. However, it can be overdone and you start to lose respect.
- Ok to prove a point. It can probably be overdone.

- Yes, it gets people's attention especially at the beginning of sermons. It could be overdone, I suppose. It isn't yet.
- It can definitely be overdone; however, you have never done that.
- I think it is helpful, but I certainly believe it can be overdone. Then you only remember the humor and not the message.
- I believe it is helpful. It probably could be overdone if you lose sight of the purpose of it as it pertains to the sermon.
- Yes, I feel the pastors will do an outstanding job within reason with humor.
- Yes, it is helpful. Yes, it can be overdone! By going on and on with the deprecating them, people will click off. One little mention, appreciate the chuckle, and move on! You did it well.
- It makes the pastor be believable as a "regular" person. Of course, don't overdo it, spread it out over time or it might become depressing.
- It can be overdone sometimes, but it is also good because it reminds us that you are a normal person just like the rest of us.
- Yes, no, gives the audience the feeling of "common grounds" with the pastor. Again related to "we're all human and make the same mistakes and have the same thoughts."
- Yes. It can be overdone, but I have not noticed that experience in sermons I have heard over the years. Some pastors, and one previously at our church, do not use this tool. I think it helps engage with the parishioners.

3. The preacher told a humorous story about a scientist and a Lutheran pastor in today's sermon. If you remember it, please describe it.

- Scientist said we could clone people. We can do what God did, and the pastor said to prove it. Scientist grabbed dirt and pastor stopped him and said get your own dirt.
- A scientist can not do what God can do, although he thinks he can.
- It had to do with creating a human out of "dirt." The pastor told the scientist to "use his own dirt."
- I do not recall a scientist mentioned. However, I liked the story about the small boat he crafted and sailed it across the lake and lost it. Later he retrieved it from a pawn shop – "bought it back."
- The pastor started with the base – first things first, make the dirt.
- The scientist said he could clone a human being so we don't have to talk about creation. The pastor told him to take his own dirt and try to make a human being!
- Preacher told the scientist to use his own dirt and try to create man.
- "Use your own dirt!"
- The scientist "could make everything God did." But when the scientist reached for a handful of dirt to make man, the pastor told him to get his own dirt.
- It was about cloning man. The scientist grabbing dirt, but couldn't use it because it belonged to God.
- The preacher placed a boat on a lake and it was lost. He then saw it in a pawn shop and felt it was due that it be given back to him.
- The scientist told the pastor he didn't need to talk about God anymore because science could do anything God can do. The pastor said not so. God can create life was one example.

Do you remember the point the preacher was trying to make by telling this story? If so, please describe it. Did the story reinforce the preacher's point?

- Everything is made by God. Yes, it helped to reinforce the point.
- Worship belongs to God. He brings out Christ and his work of redemption very well.
- Yes, only God created everything, even dirt. Yes.
- Jesus was sent by God to “buy us back” and save us (me). The story was excellent.
- This question helps me tie the point together better, but the point about making the dirt really drove the point of what God does for us, or should I say, what we take for granted and we think we know something.
- Yes, that God created all of us.
- God created everything, and you don’t have that power.
- If we think we can go off on our own, we are going to fail. Everything we have and are is from God. It reinforced that we need to give our all to God.
- God made everything and everything is God’s. We owe God his due respect.
- The point was that everything belonged to God because he created it. I do feel the story reinforced the point that we should thank/worship God for all He has given us.
- Yes, it did reinforce that we need to be aware of our “dues” to others.
- Give God his due on things that are God’s, and scientists their due on the things that are in the scientific realm. Everything in the world is not based on scientific scenarios.

4. Do you remember any other humorous elements in today’s sermon? If so, please describe them/it.

- Factory worker reading Bible and boss says that more should do that. How 50 year old can repeat story about sailboat told by your pastor that confirmed you when you were 12 years old.
- It isn’t exactly as humorous as other elements in the sermon, but the little boy who built a sailboat, painted it, etc. and put it into the water. It sailed across to the other side and when he ran to retrieve it, it was gone. He later found it in a pawn shop and then spent everything he had to buy it back!
- The explanation of Matthew 22:15-22 was excellent. I need that education.
- I mainly remember the point about the scientist.
- Pastor mentioned to stay awake during a long sermon, and he taught Pastor Clark a trick—stick your hand in your pocket and pinch your leg hard!
- Cheetah commercial. Paying attention during sermon.
- I think those were the high points. I know there were more, but I cannot think of them right now. Maybe around 2-3am, I’ll click on!
- The beginning Super Bowl commercial with the man, the cheetah and the Mountain Dew. Hadn’t seen that one, caught my attention quickly.
- The not preaching over 15 minutes and reminding Pastor Clark to pinch his leg.
- Sermon length and Mountain Dew, all great elements.
- The story about the boy setting his boat a sail, and it went across the lake and when he went to get it, the boat was gone. Three weeks later it showed up in a pawn shop. He bought it back. Good analogy with our relationship to God. He made us and “Bought us back.”

5. What do you remember most about today’s sermon? What was most meaningful to you?

- Give to God what is due to Him---Prayer and praise at all times.
- The Gospel message. Jesus’ work of redemption, which is the heart of our faith.

- The way we can glorify God when our lives fall short of His glory is honesty.
- It was all good!
- The commercial, give to Caesar what is due to Caesar and to God what is God's. God gives and makes everything starting with the dirt. This helps to take pride away. The boat that was lost and had to be bought again. Most meaningful - Jesus gave His life for us, and we constantly need to be reminded of this.
- Respect God and give Him the due that He commands. Just knowing that we belong to God, and Jesus died for our sins to set us free. God gives us all of our blessings.
- Give to God what belongs to Him. Also everything we have is God's.
- We need to remember that God gave us everything and bought us also. Give Him his due.
- Do the Dew – Do the Due – Due the Do. I hadn't really thought of the third possibility while looking through the bulletin before the service.
- Honesty. It made me think of how many levels of honesty there are in life—to yourself, family, friends, church, God—it made for good self-reflection and gave thought to what/how do you make it work, find the right balance that you should.
- "Worship is God's due."
- We are all sinners and owe so much to God for all we have. We should give Him his "due" in all we do in conducting our daily lives. We have the blessing of forgiveness of our sins.

APPENDIX D INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

HUMOR IN PREACHING Immanuel Lutheran Church Interview

1. In general, how do you feel about a preacher using humor in sermons?

Regarding the frequency of humor in sermons –do you think that there ought to be more humor in sermons, about the same amount of humor in sermons, or less humor in sermons here at Immanuel?

2. Self-deprecating humor is used when a speaker pokes fun of himself or makes light of himself. Would you say that the pastors at Immanuel use self-deprecating humor in sermons often, occasionally, or not at all?

If you said that the pastors use self-deprecating humor often or occasionally, please state how this kind of humor makes you feel about the preacher.

Do you see any dangers in using self-deprecating humor in sermons? If so, what are the dangers?

3. A speaker engages in physical humor when he makes gestures or movements that evoke laughter. Do you feel that this kind of humor is appropriate in preaching? On a scale of one to ten with ten being the highest, how comfortable are you with physical humor in sermons?

Could you give me any examples of physical humor that might be inappropriate in preaching?

4. Do you believe that humor in sermons helps you remember sermon points? If so, why do you suppose it helps?

5. Puns, word plays and silly names are occasionally used in sermons. These sometimes cause hearers to listen more carefully, groan inwardly, or scratch their heads in confusion. How do they affect you?

6. Exaggeration takes place when people overstate something and stretch the bounds of reality. To say your packed suitcase feels like “a ton of bricks” is an exaggeration. Have you noticed humorous exaggerations in the sermons delivered at Immanuel?

Since exaggerations are often used in everyday language, do you think that many exaggerations in sermons go unnoticed? What might be a benefit to using exaggerations? What might be a drawback to using them?

7. An imported joke is a joke that doesn't relate to the sermon topic at all. The speaker tells a joke simply for the sake of telling a joke and evoking laughter. Although Immanuel's pastors rarely use imported jokes in sermons, how helpful do you think they might be in preaching?

In general, how do you feel about imported jokes?

8. People generally relate to stories very well, especially when they evoke strong emotions. In your opinion, are sermon points communicated more effectively by using serious stories or by using humorous stories?

APPENDIX E INTERVIEW RESPONSES

HUMOR IN PREACHING Immanuel Lutheran Church Interview Results

1. In general, how do you feel about a preacher using humor in sermons?
 - I think it's good. It keeps everyone's attention.
 - I think it's necessary – a limited amount is necessary.
 - I like it.
 - I'm positive about it. I like the positive aspect of humor. I avoid depressing, negative things.
 - I'm 1000% in favor of it. Makes the preacher more humorous. Gets and keeps your attention.
 - I think it's a good idea. It helps the congregation be more attentive. Helps people focus.
 - I enjoy it. I think it's important. Makes the pastor appear friendly. It relaxes congregation.
 - I like it. Makes the pastor more human. Relaxes people. Keeps your attention.
 - I enjoy it. It draws you in—makes worship more personal. Makes the pastor more approachable. Pastor is a "real" guy.
 - Think it's fine. I like it.
 - Think it's great. Love it.
 - It's very engaging, helps you personalize the message.
 - Not a problem. Sometimes gets your attention. A bit of levity to help relieve tension when talking about serious things.
 - I like it.
 - I think it's wonderful. Helps engage people and helps me remember the sermon.
 - It's excellent. Pulls the congregation in. Sometimes sermons are too stoic. Humor is an attention grabber.
 - I think it's great. Keeps you in touch with the sermon. Keeps you awake. Humor can make someone's day.
 - I like it.
 - I like it.

- I think it's a useful communication tool. I'm in favor of it.
- I like it. Too much humor causes the sermon to be mere entertainment.
- I like it. It loosens people up and makes them feel comfortable.
- I like it. It's a good idea.
- Very effective. Allows a pastor to relate to members.
- I appreciate it. I tend to see humor in life.
- It helps you develop a bond with the pastor. A pastor needs to be discerning about his humor and choose types that reflect his personality.
- If it makes a point, it's good. Used in moderation, it's appropriate. Shouldn't be entertainment, should make a point.
- It's appropriate in the right situation/context. Find it engaging, can grab my attention.
- Get's my attention, engages me. Makes pastor approachable.
- It's appropriate in some situations, trust the pastor to make the distinction. I like it.

Regarding the frequency of humor in sermons –do you think that there ought to be more humor in sermons, about the same amount of humor in sermons, or less humor in sermons here at Immanuel?

- About the same amount.
- About the same.
- About the same amount to a little more.
- A little more humor.
- About the same amount.
- About the same. It's pretty balanced.
- About the same.
- About the same.
- About the same. Depends on the topic. Sermons are a nice mix of different elements.
- A little more.
- About the same.
- About the same.
- About the same.
- About the same.
- About the same amount.
- Same amount.
- Between more and the same amount. A little more would be fine.
- A little bit more. About the right amount, but a little more would be nice.
- About the same amount, especially good at the beginning of a sermon.
- About the same.
- More humor – don't overdo it and become a comedian.
- A little more. Usually the amount per sermon is good.
- About the same amount, there's a good mix.
- More humor or about the same.

- Occasionally

If you said that the pastors use self-deprecating humor often or occasionally, please state how this kind of humor makes you feel about the preacher.

- He's real, true to life. He's genuine/normal.
- It's not necessary for my part.
- Keeps me in touch with the pastor. Same things happen to you that happen to us.
- It makes me feel like I know him better. Makes him seem humble.
- Makes him look more human, more approachable, puts you in mind of our common humanity, common problems and experiences.
- They face the same issues as we do. Have same trials and tribulations. Makes him seem like a real person, genuine.
- Makes him human. He's just as humorous as we are. Makes you feel like he's one of us. Don't think less of him.
- Makes me feel that he's one of us. Can get to know the pastor better. See both sides of the pastor.
- I feel like he's not so unapproachable, it's comforting, the preacher is one of us.
- It gives me a good feeling. Sharing something personal. Makes you think about what he is saying.
- Puts himself on the same level as us. More human, genuine. Exactly so.
- Makes the preacher more human, shared experiences draw us together.
- It doesn't change how I feel about the preachers, especially since I know them.
- Makes me feel closer to pastor. Get to know pastor better when he talks about personal things. He's not so formal.
- Helps you relate to pastor, makes him more human, more genuine.
- That he's a fellow human being and Christian. He's a good ole' boy. More genuine and down to earth.
- Makes me feel great. I respect him more. Makes him more human—he also is a child of God. Makes him more approachable. Can approach him with any subject.
- Can better identify with him, and he has the same problems as we do. Puts you on the same ground.
- Preacher appears comfortable in his own skin. Has enough confidence to make light of himself.
- Makes him more human, can identify with the pastor. Reflects humility. Makes him more approachable. Makes me feel like the preacher can identify with me. You understand me. Makes pastor more entertaining—which can be good or bad.
- Humanizes the preacher, it's a safe kind of humor.
- Makes him more human, you can identify with him.
- Makes them seem more human, more like one of us.
- Makes the pastor seem more human/genuine.

- I feel it enables them to relate to my position in life. They're talking to me and not down to me.
- Useful when it makes a point, makes the preacher more human. Can relate to quirks, shortcomings. An element of self-esteem, preacher has enough confidence so he can make light of himself.
- Makes you feel like the preacher is one of us.
- O.K. because using it to make a point. It's not appropriate when it doesn't make a point.
- Makes the pastor genuine, easier to relate to the pastor.
- Makes him seem human, see it as a sign of humanity. Not poking fun of others.

Do you see any dangers in using self-deprecating humor in sermons? If so, what are the dangers?

- Overuse – would be putting yourself down. Eventually would lower the congregation's opinion.
- People might use it to be critical of the pastor/preacher. Might lower their opinion of the pastor.
- No, not as long as the preacher is comfortable sharing personal things with us.
- No, not at all.
- Too often and people might lose respect for the pastor, lower level of respect.
- Not if it's done occasionally and related to the topic. More of a positive character/image issue.
- I don't see any dangers.
- No. You don't say anything mean or derogatory about yourself or your family.
- Shouldn't trash yourself and lose the congregation's respect.
- Only if it was overused. Would be too much like a comedian. Could get in the habit of cutting self down.
- No.
- If done too much it could be a distraction and get in the way of the sermon. Still want people to look up to the pastor.
- Can be misused. A weak Christian might view the pastor with a wrong image—as stupid or incapable.
- I don't think so. I haven't heard anything inappropriate.
- No, unless pastor insults himself too severely. People might wonder if he's capable.
- Yes. Need to be cautious in using it in situations. Still want to maintain an attitude of respect and dignity. Shouldn't degrade yourself.
- I don't see any. Preacher might be perceived as vulnerable to unfair criticisms and attacks.
- None come to mind.
- No dangers.

- May question your abilities, aptitude. Done too much makes me question the speaker's confidence. May trivialize my concerns. Run the risk of having people being offended because you're making fun of our problems that they have as well.
 - There is some—with older members who put the pastor on a pedestal. Might think it's inappropriate for the office.
 - Too much personal information makes it distasteful or shocking.
 - Go overboard and people might take it too literally.
 - Used too often, speaker may lose respect of parishioners. Give the impression that he's fishing for compliments.
 - If the text or message doesn't lend itself to humor, message won't get through. If the self-deprecating humor appears to be putting other people down as well.
 - Overuse may cause people to lose respect and tune out. It can get old. Keep family members out of it or make sure your sharing is safe.
 - If the preacher uses it too much, he may lose respect.
 - No, as long as the congregation feels in touch with the preacher. Done too often, people may not be able to relate to the preacher.
 - Must convey that the preacher is in control, don't do it to the point of appearing like a fool.
 - No dangers if done properly—don't put yourself down, make light of yourself. Not a problem at Immanuel.
3. A speaker engages in physical humor when he makes gestures or movements that evoke laughter. Do you feel that this kind of humor is appropriate in preaching? On a scale of one to ten with ten being the highest, how comfortable are you with physical humor in sermons?
- Can be. Done appropriately, 10. Needs to be creative.
 - It's O.K. 6
 - Yes. 8
 - Occasionally. 9 or 10 if used in moderation.
 - Done occasionally, it's appropriate. 10
 - Yes, I don't see a problem as long as it relates to the sermon. More visual— which is good. Holds attention. 8
 - I don't see anything wrong with it as long as it's appropriate. 10
 - It's appropriate as long as it relates to the topic. 10
 - It's appropriate. 10
 - Yes, within limits. 8
 - It's appropriate. 9
 - Yes. 4
 - Usually appropriate. 8
 - It's a rare thing, could help increase participation. 8-9
 - Yes, no different from people saying "Amen" and throwing up their hands. Hand gestures can be effective in communicating serious points. Why not with humorous points? 8

- Sometimes. 10
- Appropriate, but not as effective as self-deprecating humor. 10
- Yes, in moderation. 10
- O.K. as long as you don't get too carried away. 10
- Absolutely, yes. 8. Especially good when used in a self-deprecating way.
- Yes, 10.
- Can be effective. 5.
- O.K. in limited quantities. 6.
- Yes, 8.
- Yes, if done carefully. 10.
- Can be appropriate. It's pretty unusual. Should be tame—don't see it lending itself to sermons. 2.
- Used sparingly it's O.K. 5
- Very appropriate if you get your point across. If in hysterics, you overdid it. 5
- Should be careful in using physical humor because it's so unusual in sermons. Can be intimidating. 3
- Can be, should be less frequent. 3

Could you give me any examples of physical humor that might be inappropriate in preaching?

- Can't think of any off hand.
- Obscene gestures. Pratt fall, slapstick.
- I can't imagine anything inappropriate during a sermon.
- Nothing comes to mind.
- Obscene gestures. Slapstick.
- I can't think of any. Don't come across it that often.
- Swearing/obscene gestures.
- Maybe vulgar gestures.
- Slapstick comedy.
- Obscene or rude gestures.
- Slapstick, especially if it involves another person.
- Slapstick comedy, falling down.
- None that I've seen. Inappropriate noises.
- Might embarrass people, pick right people to interact with.
- Offensive hand gestures. No aggressive, violent gestures.
- Obscene or degrading gestures.
- Obscene gestures.
- Imitating or putting someone down.
- Imitating people.
- Obscene gestures, nothing political. Don't mimic physical deformities/handicaps. Making fun of devotional gestures (like making the sign of the cross).
- Obscene gestures, even as an example.

- I haven't seen anything that would be inappropriate.
 - Slipping on a banana peel. Hitting yourself.
 - Demeaning hand gestures or pratt falls.
 - Mimic vomiting.
 - Can't think of any.
 - No.
 - No.
 - Can't think of anything. Nothing violent. Don't clap loudly.
 - Inappropriate hand gestures.
4. Do you believe that humor in sermons helps you remember sermon points? If so, why do you suppose it helps?
- Yes. Brings in a real aspect, highlights the point.
 - Yes. Because it's different from the rest of the sermon. Thought provoking – how is it going to relate to the topic.
 - Yes. Humor involves stories and details, apply stories to your life.
 - It does. Serves as an illustration, a good rhetorical device/aid.
 - Yes, definitely. I can relate to it, there's a personal connection.
 - Yes. It gets a reaction out of people and they remember the points. Leaves a mental impression.
 - Yes. Draws your attention to point.
 - Yes. Hard to forget humorous anecdotes.
 - Yes. Because Scriptural teachings are heavy, humor relieves the tension and makes things applicable. Brings things down to earth.
 - I do. It sure doesn't hurt. A specific reference is easy to remember. Out of the ordinary. It's a point of reference.
 - Yes. It stands out, grabs your attention.
 - Yes. Humor is often used in personal application of points. Application made with humor is easy to remember. Helps with transitions.
 - Yes. Generally, humor engages you. I like the fill in the blanks sermon outline. That really helps me remember.
 - Yes. It's something different. Grabs your attention.
 - Yes, illustrates the point, holds your attention.
 - I think so. As long as it's related to the topic. Helps me because I can associate the humor with the points. Like name association.
 - Yes. Because it illustrates points well. Gives me a visual—can place myself in the situation.
 - Yes. Can relate to funny stories because has happened to us. It's an attention getter.
 - Yes. It brings it all together and is a reference point when discussing sermon at home. When we discuss it, points are remembered.
 - Yes. It creates a pause so you listen more carefully. Makes an easy transition. Gives a frame of reference, leads to serious points and makes you open to those points. Breaks sermon into chapter and verse.
 - Yes. It's an attention getter. Overuse can ruin it.

- Possibly. Depends on one's mood. Depends on my mood.
 - Sometimes. Humorous stories are easy to remember because stories are easy to remember.
 - Yes, humor helps me relate to the point. Makes it more personal. Humor is often used in a story and I can remember the story.
 - Yes. It helps make me a connection. I can relate to it—reminds me of something I have done.
 - Yes. It's a hook that gets your attention. Taps into your primary memory. Should probably use it at the end of the sermon.
 - Certain points. It's a little different, easier to remember new things.
 - Yes. It draws my attention to what comes afterward, the message that follows.
 - Yes. Because I'm humorous and I like it. Breaks sermon into smaller pieces.
 - Absolutely. Because used sparingly and to make a point, you connect it to the point.
5. Puns, word plays and silly names are occasionally used in sermons. These sometimes cause hearers to listen more carefully, groan inwardly, or scratch their heads in confusion. How do they affect you?
- Help clarify, listen more carefully.
 - Listen more carefully. I like puns.
 - Listen more carefully, scratch my head a little. Take a while to get on sometimes.
 - I'm going to listen more carefully, definitely. It's an attention getter. They help me remember sermons, word associations. Puns can be trite and overused. I'm not a big fan of puns.
 - Listen more carefully, groan inwardly, and scratch my head in confusion. All three.
 - Has a positive effect. Maybe listen more carefully.
 - Listen more carefully, groan inwardly (but that's O.K. because it still gets my attention).
 - Listen more carefully, corny stuff goes by me—don't always recognize it as being corny.
 - They are an attention getter. Makes me think.
 - Listen more carefully. They get my attention.
 - Listen more carefully.
 - Word play helps illustrate points—causes me to understand the point.
 - Don't dislike them, but don't have strong effect on me.
 - Listen more carefully. I enjoy them.
 - Listen more carefully. I like them. Causes me to look forward to the next one.
 - I like them. It's an intelligent, thought provoking humor. Listen more carefully.

- Listen more carefully. They're thought provoking and prepare me for what's coming. It's like a puzzle.
 - Listen more carefully.
 - Listen more carefully.
 - Don't really engage me. Sometimes puns become distracting if you don't get it right away.
 - Listen more carefully and groan inwardly (groan in a good way).
 - Listen more carefully.
 - Listen more carefully and groan inwardly.
 - Listen more carefully.
 - Listen more carefully.
 - Listen more carefully. Brings intelligence to the sermon. Like them.
 - Listen more carefully.
 - Listen more carefully.
 - Listen more carefully.
 - Listen more carefully.
 - Listen more carefully.
6. Exaggeration takes place when people overstate something and stretch the bounds of reality. To say your packed suitcase feels like "a ton of bricks" is an exaggeration. Have you noticed humorous exaggerations in the sermons delivered at Immanuel?
- Yes.
 - Yes.
 - Probably.
 - I don't remember any.
 - Nothing stands out.
 - Yes.
 - Yes, I can't think of any particulars.
 - Don't remember any.
 - I'm not sure.
 - Some.
 - No.
 - Yes. Can't think of particulars.
 - Not particularly.
 - No.
 - Some, not overdone.
 - Sometimes.
 - Yes.
 - Yes. Nothing in particular comes to mind.
 - Yes.
 - Yes. Blind pastor reference.
 - Yes, can't think of any particulars.
 - Yes, no examples come to mind.
 - Yes, can't think of specific example.

- Yes, don't remember what they were.
- Not too much.
- Yes, exploding shoe factory. Refrigerator full of food.
- No.
- Yes.
- Definitely.
- Nothing comes to mind.

Since exaggerations are often used in everyday language, do you think that many exaggerations in sermons go unnoticed? What might be a benefit to using exaggerations? What might be a drawback to using them?

- People do notice because they're paying attention more carefully.
Benefit – Attention getter, convey understanding through contrasting.
Drawback – Overused, you would lose your credibility.
- I agree.
Benefit – It's a word picture and not normal, so it's something you remember.
Drawback – You could offend people by exaggerating something important to them.
- Probably.
Benefit – Makes a strong point. Shows that this point is important.
Drawback – Too much might lessen your credibility.
- People do notice them.
Benefit – If describing something in the Bible, can use them to explain and illustrate.
Drawback – People might be offended. Might affirm sinful behavior by using extreme examples.
- I think so. It's a normal part of talking.
Benefit – Brings home a strong point.
Drawback – If it gets too silly, people will be annoyed.
- People notice them.
Benefit – Can make a strong point, it can be an attention getter.
Drawback – Used too often they lose their effect. Should be appropriate to the topic. People want to believe in what they're hearing, so overstating something can be a detriment.
- Yes.
Benefit – Stirs imagination and wakes people up.
Drawback – Could offend people—making light of something that's important to them. People might view pastor as flippant.
- Yes.
Benefit – Makes sermon more interesting.
Drawback – Could offend someone.
- Yes.
Benefit – Useful for getting a point across—vivid language.
Drawback – Might have a hard time recognizing phrases as exaggerations.

- People still notice them.
Benefit – Makes you think. Makes you think of old sayings that are so true.
Drawback – Overuse them and it makes the sermon too flowery.
- Are noticed.
Benefit – Listen more closely, vivid language, engaging.
Drawback – Can't think of any.
- Probably so.
Benefit – Good way to explain concepts, effective illustrations.
Drawback – Too silly, ridiculous would be a distraction.
- Point still comes across. Usually it clicks.
Benefit – Catch your attention.
Drawback – People might not understand it's an exaggeration. Some folks are very literal.
- Probably.
Benefit – Get your word across better. Use as an illustration.
Drawback – People misunderstanding them.
- Go unnoticed unless an odd exaggeration is used and emphasized.
Benefit – Makes them think about their lives.
Drawback – Might take offense at what they perceive as being disrespectful.
- I don't think so. It's unexpected, so people tend to listen to them better.
Benefit – The exaggeration can communicate the magnitude or seriousness of a point. Comparisons help people understand. Calls attention to a detail.
Drawback – Not taken seriously. Can diminish what really happened.
- Often they are thought provoking—sometimes go unnoticed.
Benefit – Can be used in examples/illustrations easily and powerfully.
Drawback – None, as long as in proper context.
- I think you would notice them.
Benefit – Gets your attention, listen more closely.
Drawback – Might offend some people. You might make light of a sensitive issue.
- Are usually noticed.
Benefit – Use of vivid language drives home your point.
Drawback – Can't think of any.
- Are noticed, but some become trite. Don't have a huge impact. New exaggerations are helpful.
Benefit – Helps to illustrate a point. Adds a lighthearted quality. Helps to broaden the point.
Drawback – Could offend people, they could take it personally, may view it as ridicule.
- No. They understand what you mean.
Benefit – Clarify your points, conveying the seriousness of what you're getting across.
Drawback – If they think it's a ridiculous exaggeration, may tune out.

- Possibly. I use them a lot.
Benefit – Good to use to make a point, makes speech interesting.
Drawback – Someone could take it too literally. Someone could miss the point.
 - Yes.
Benefit – People might notice something more about themselves. Might think, “I’ve felt that way before.”
Drawback – Might minimize the point the speaker is making.
 - Probably.
Benefit – Extremes cause people to listen and understand. Use of vivid language makes you think.
Drawback – Offend people.
 - Definitely yes.
Benefit – Helps bring home a point. The statements are outrageous and get people’s attention.
Drawback – A literal person might be confused.
 - Yes. In general, people miss them.
Benefit – Helps prove a point.
Drawback – Can hit home and be a little too personal.
 - Benefit – Can make a point.
Drawback – None.
 - I notice them.
Benefit – Can drive home a point.
Drawback – State something too many times, lose attention.
 - Yes.
Benefit – Can be a good sermon illustration.
Drawback – Distracting if not making a point.
 - Possibly.
Benefit – To draw people’s attention to a sermon point, makes a strong point.
Drawback – Can’t think of any.
7. An imported joke is a joke that doesn’t relate to the sermon topic at all. The speaker tells a joke simply for the sake of telling a joke and evoking laughter. Although Immanuel’s pastors rarely use imported jokes in sermons, how helpful do you think they might be in preaching?
- Not helpful. Would be a distraction.
 - I don’t see any benefit to using them.
 - Might wake people up. Be an attraction getter. Use it to lighten the mood.
 - Could be used to keep people alert. Wake people up.
 - Not helpful. Could create an atmosphere that’s not conducive to worship. Could lose respect if worship degenerates into entertainment.
 - Not very helpful. More appropriate in a social setting. Could be an O.K. opener. A lot of jokes are offensive, so you have to be careful.
 - People might think the pastor’s not prepared.

- Not necessary. Jokes/humor should relate to the sermon.
- May not draw me in, but won't prevent me from listening.
- Could be used as opener to grab attention. It could distract a little, but I would still be engaged.
- Not helpful. Don't have a place.
- Not helpful. Don't want the pastor to come off like an MC.
- Not helpful, might be distracting.
- Not very helpful.
- Personally not helpful, but may appeal to some. May be attracted to pastor.
- Could be used to regain the focus of a congregation. Use them to wake people up --but doesn't communicate.
- Not very. Might be distracting—thinking about the joke instead of the topic.
- Should be in to help the sermon, otherwise it isn't helpful.
- Not helpful at all.
- Not important to a sermon. Could be used as an opener/call to order.
- Not at all helpful, may be distracting.
- I don't like them. They're not helpful.
- As an opener, to catch people's attention. Maybe throw one in the middle, but would be hard to tie it in.
- Not helpful, throw me for a loop. Remember the joke, but not the sermon—could be distracting.
- Still helpful. Can engage people. Be an attention getter.
- No, distracts from the purpose.
- I doubt they are helpful.
- No.
- Not at all, would be distracting.
- No benefit.

In general, how do you feel about imported jokes?

- Don't like them. They would be detrimental to the message.
- I don't like them at all.
- They're alright used in moderation. Might be a distraction to me.
- Occasionally they're O.K.
- I really don't like it.
- Not too helpful. Needs to be some correlation.
- I don't like them. Humor should relate to sermon.
- I don't like them.
- I don't see any harm in them.
- Not offended by them. I prefer humor that makes a point and ties into the sermon.
- I don't care for them.
- Not relevant. Don't care for them.

- When I've heard it, I felt it was out of place. Makes the sermon disjointed, distracts me.
 - If it doesn't pertain, it's not beneficial. Preacher should avoid imported jokes.
 - I'm O.K. with them. We eventually get to the topic.
 - Use sparingly.
 - Don't want them in sermons. Not needed. Serves no purpose.
 - I'm fine with them.
 - Don't like them.
 - Not overly enthusiastic about them. No thought put into it. Doesn't seem genuine or artistic/creative. Not intelligent.
 - They're not appropriate.
 - Don't like them.
 - If they're funny they're O.K. Otherwise what's the point?
 - Don't like them.
 - I love them. I love class comedians.
 - I don't care for them.
 - I don't like them.
 - I don't like them.
 - Don't like them in sermons.
 - In sermons, don't have a place. Should be tied to a topic.
8. People generally relate to stories very well, especially when they evoke strong emotions. In your opinion, are sermon points communicated more effectively by using serious stories or by using humorous stories?
- Humorous stories are more effective. Serious stories may make me emotional, and I'm already emotionally drained.
 - (Woman) Serious stories are more effective than humorous.
 - (Woman) Depends on the topic. Both are effective. Serious stories have a greater impact on me.
 - Both are effective. Depends on the point you're trying to make. Personally, I prefer humorous stories.
 - (Woman) A place for both. It depends on the topic. I prefer humorous stories over serious ones because there's so much seriousness in the world.
 - (Man) Serious stories are more effective. Sermon topics are usually serious matter. Joking about serious matters would confuse people and make them wonder about the pastor.
 - (Woman) Serious stories communicate more effectively because people are hungry for help for their serious problems. I do enjoy the humorous stories.
 - (Woman) Serious, true stories are more effective. I do enjoy the serious stories.
 - Both communicate equally well. A lot depends on the message. Some messages won't lend themselves to humorous stories.

- (Woman) Have about the same effect. Serious stories lend themselves to serious points more readily. Both can be used to make points effectively.
- (Woman) Humorous stories are more effective. I'd rather laugh than cry.
- (Man) A place for both. Depends on topic. Personally, I gravitate toward humorous stories.
- (Woman) Both are effective. Personally, I like both, but they have different qualities and should be used at appropriate times. (No/little humor during Good Friday sermon.)
- (Woman) Humorous stories are more effective. You lose your train of thought when you cry.
- (Woman) A humorous story will be more effective. It will provoke more thought.
- (Man) There's a time and place for both. Humorous stories wouldn't work when talking about the crucifixion. Taught that jokes should be used in openings, as a preamble.
- (Man) Serious stories – bring things to human reality. People relate readily to pain and suffering.
- (Woman) About the same. Both are effective.
- About the same. Equally effective in communicating points.
- (Man) Both have their place. For me, a serious story is more effective in making a point. Most of Scripture lends itself to serious stories rather than humorous ones. I also get a lot out of humorous stories.
- (Woman) For me, humor is more effective.
- (Woman) I prefer serious stories, but I also like humorous stories because they evoke and reflect joy. Having and sharing joy are important to me.
- (Woman) For me, serious stories communicate points more effectively.
- (Woman) I like serious stories. For women, emotional stories are more effective. I think humorous stories are more effective on men.
- (Woman) Both are equally effective. Personally, I like both.
- (Man) Both, but many stories have elements of humor and seriousness.
- (Man) Serious stories are more effective.
- Both equally well.
- (Man) For me, serious stories are more effective in communicating sermon points.
- (Man) Both equally well.

APPENDIX F

FOCUS GROUP REACTION PAPERS

Rev. Matthew Clark
Focus Group Response
May 25, 2009

As a newer pastor who has now been in parish ministry for nearly two years since attending seminary, I still seek to hone my homiletical skills in order to most effectively proclaim the truth of God's Word to His people. One of the questions that I have asked myself is, "Should humor be used in preaching in order to accomplish this goal?" If so, *how* can I rightly gauge what kinds of humor are most effective in communicating the message, or logos? By which jokes get the biggest laugh? By which funny anecdotes get the most comments from parishioners? Rather than using subjective means such as these, Rev. Troup's Major Applied Project (MAP), "Humor in Preaching: Its Effects and Guidelines for Its Beneficial Use" provides me with a practical theological framework, which I can use to determine how to best use humor in my own preaching.

I appreciate the way in which Rev. Troup utilizes both solid theology as well as academic research in his MAP. For instance, I highly value Rev. Troup's uniquely Lutheran perspective when addressing humor in preaching. He thoroughly treats the topic using Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, and an understanding that sermons should have the content of both Law and Gospel. However, I also appreciate the way in

which Rev. Troup uses recent communication research and his own field research in order to form practical guidelines for humor in preaching.

Rev. Troup's description of humor as "a gift" is well chosen. For instance, on page 54 of his MAP, he writes, "...humor and laughter are gifts from God. Like all God's gifts, they can be abused, but they can also be used for God's glory. They are not substitutes for the Gospel, but tools for the Gospel, aids in proclaiming Christ to the nations." Later, in the "Conclusions and Guidelines" section of his MAP, Rev. Troup presents practical ways to help readers use the gift of humor to God's glory. This section in particular where types of humor are categorized and evaluated, I found especially helpful within the context of parish ministry.

While Rev. Troup's MAP is an excellent work, I do have a few suggestions. One suggestion is to be more intentional about how humor in preaching applies specifically to postmodern listeners. On page 5 Rev. Troup writes, "...for anyone concerned about communicating Biblical truths to a postmodern world through preaching, the results of the project should be of interest." With the exception of a description of postmodern communication techniques on page 3 and a quote from Dr. Nielsen on page 38 concerning the need to use vivid images and stories in sermons for people living in a postmodern age, there is little specific reference to the relationship of humor and postmodernism. I do recognize, however, that simply conducting field research among listeners who live in a postmodern age in and of itself addresses humor's relationship with postmodernism to a certain extent.

Another suggestion is possibly editing the first sentence of the section titled "Christian Joy" on page 15. The sentence reads, "While the Bible is silent when it comes

to the use of humor in preaching and teaching, Scripture is full of references concerning Christian joy.” I would suggest that while the Bible may be silent when it comes to the *prescriptive* use of humor in preaching and teaching, it does speak of many *descriptive* examples of humor (as Rev. Troup points out in pages 11-13).

Rev. Troup asks the question on page 16, “Will not a humorous preacher better convey a sense of Christian joy than a somber one?” He then uses a number of quotations from various authors to illustrate that the answer to this question is “yes.” I also believe that the answer is “yes.” I would also suggest, however, that perhaps a helpful addition to the citations that Rev. Troup gives would be from C.F.W. Walther’s Law and Gospel where Walther states in his first evening lecture, “I do not want you to stand in your pulpits like lifeless statures, but to speak with confidence and with *cheerful* (emphasis added) courage offer help where help is needed.”

In conclusion, it is my opinion that Rev. Troup’s MAP is a beneficial piece for not only pastors, but also for seminarians. On page 4 of his MAP, Rev. Troup references Dr. Schmitt of Concordia Seminary as saying, “he (Dr. Schmitt) has never conducted a course in which the subject of humor hasn’t naturally entered class discussion.” As a recent seminary graduate, I would suggest that Rev. Troup’s MAP, especially his section “Conclusions and Guidelines,” would be helpful as at least recommended, if not required, reading for seminarians studying homiletics in preparation to serve as a pastor.

**REACTION PAPER
TO
HUMOR IN PREACHING:
ITS EFFECTS AND GUIDELINES FOR ITS BENEFICIAL USE
By
Tony Troup**

Submitted by:

**Rev. Michael L. Kumm
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Note: Pastor Troup presented his paper on Humor in Preaching at the Mon-Clair Circuit 6 Winkel on Tuesday, May 19, 2009.

Pastor Troup approached the pastors of our circuit some time ago to ask us to be his “focus group” for the Major Applied Project required by his studies toward a Doctor of Ministry degree. We agreed. I have to admit to being very skeptical hearing that the topic was going to be humor in preaching. I, personally am not inclined to tell jokes, etc. in my preaching, which is what this topic brought immediately to my mind. Even to the day of presentation, I confess to being less than enthused about the presentation.

As Pastor Troup presented his paper, I found myself being drawn into the discussion as it addressed something that I hold very dear; practical application to the Holy Ministry. This paper was written, even though an academic work, in a very down-to-earth manner and easily understood.

My initial reactions to the paper and topic were completely unfounded. Pastor Troup has presented this topic in a very organized manner with obviously much thought, research and discussion with others. The topics within the paper are orderly and helpful when considering this aspect of preaching.

During his presentation, it was humorous in itself to watch the other pastors in the room laugh, nod their heads and say “Yes! I know exactly what you mean!” I truly think a lot of what Pastor Troup has included in his paper was not new to us, but had never been presented in a manner that caused us to think about the real application of humor in our preaching. All of us were (or are) doing it, but probably didn’t even realize it. Or if we did, we didn’t really think about it.

This paper has brought to light several things that every pastor should consider when preaching. The basic homiletical axiom of “know your hearers” is most important when considering the use of humor. What appeals to your hearer? What does not? What offends? I personally resonated with the discussion on self-deprecating humor while discussing the relationship to ethos. Picking on oneself can indeed break down barriers and make the preacher appear and feel more accessible and “real”.

Humor in the context of preaching will not save anyone. We know that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ (Romans 10:17), but I agree with Pastor Troup that the use of humor in preaching the Gospel can open ears.

I thank Pastor Troup for this paper. I will use it in my own preaching as well as when I work with resident field education students who preach at the congregation I am privileged to serve. The paper contains valuable information, given in an extremely practical manner that we, as preachers, can all use.

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MLK:mk

Humor in Preaching: Its Effects and Guidelines for Its Beneficial Use
By Pr. Tony Troup

A Reaction by Pr. Bruce Keseman

The practical and pastoral aspects of this paper seem immediately apparent. I put some of the suggestions into practice from the pulpit already on the Sunday after Pr. Troup presented his findings to our Circuit pastors. For instance, with a bit of self-deprecation, I contrasted my own lack of horticultural abilities to one member's well-known talents with plants in order to illustrate a point from First John. As one who is concerned that preachers use humor too often in ways that do not serve the proclamation of Christ's Law and Gospel, I rejoice that this paper presents both appropriate cautions about the use of humor and helpful recommendations for rightly using humor ministerially.

Preachers can err in one of two ways, as this paper seems to imply. Some treat humor in the pulpit almost as anathema; others attempt to be funny without a godly purpose. Pr. Troup's work shows that our Lord often used humor in His preaching—I can't help but wonder how many times He left people smiling or even laughing when He told His stories!—as did the apostles while writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. So there certainly is a place for wit in preaching. Yet the Biblically recorded humor of our Lord and His disciples always served the purpose of conveying the words of God. That purpose must remain central when we seek to elicit laughter (or at least smiles) from our hearers today. One of my concerns—and Pr. Troup clearly shares this concern—is that the jokes in sermons often are remembered, but the Scriptural point connected with that humor is forgotten. It is hard to understand how that use of comedy

is consistent with the Scriptural model. In some worst-case scenarios today, preachers do not even intend to make a point with humor but simply tell jokes for the sake of drawing a laugh. More often, the preacher intends for the humor to illustrate his sermon, but the comedy is more memorable than the point from God's Word. That can be true even when using humor in the ways that Pr. Troup suggests can be salutary (and my own experience confirms his conclusion that self-deprecating humor, in particular, can be very effective in preaching). Therefore, I especially applaud this paper for providing guidelines that help to ensure that humor in preaching serves the overall purpose of proclaiming God's Word, particularly God's Word of Law.

Besides helping to illustrate or punctuate what our Lord teaches us, this paper explained an additional benefit to humor that I had not considered, namely, that Christians often view their pastor's humor as a sign of their authenticity. Reflection on my own experience suggests that that statement is very true. My "humor" tends to be dry, so my members sometimes roll their eyes rather than laughing, but even then their response indicates that they appreciate the "realness" of their pastor. When we discuss the qualifications for the ministry in First Timothy and Titus, I often introduce the topic by asking what traits people want in a pastor. Frequently, the first two qualities listed by members are faithfulness to the Word of God and humor—two traits that people might consider in some ways to be mutually opposing. However, when the latter is used to serve the former, they can—and perhaps even should—exist together. We preachers need to take caution, however, that as humor shows our humanity that we do not allow that humor to put the preaching focus on us.

I find the suggestions of Dr. David Schmitt (p. 4) to be useful, particularly that humor be natural (reflecting the fact that humor shows the authenticity of the preacher) and that humor serve the message (reflecting the fact that humor in preaching should be used not for its own sake but for the sake of God's Word). More difficult, in my opinion, is the suggestion that humor be reverential to the topic. I say that for two reasons. First, what one person perceives as reverence may not be so perceived by another. Sometimes the perception depends on the context. I recall a Holy Week sermon when, revising a popular ad slogan, I spoke of the Lord's Supper as God's way of saying, "This blood's for you." I hoped to invoke a smile and at the same time plant a thought that would be remembered when God's people came to the Table of the Lord. And had those words not been in a Holy Week sermon preached in the midst of an otherwise somber service, I probably would have achieved my purpose. However, my attempt at humor backfired because of the context. The second caveat I would add regarding humor showing reverence to the topic is that occasionally our Lord used humor rather irreverently to expose sin. Pr. Troup's example of Jesus speaking about straining out a gnat but swallowing a camel is a good illustration. That is, Jesus treated sin irreverently, but He still treated God's Word with due reverence.

I have a few disjointed suggestions that might help to further clarify a few sections of the paper. In chapter 2, I recommend distinguishing humor and joy. Joy often exists without laughter and sometimes even without a smile. On the other hand, it is difficult for me to imagine that humor can often exist without at least a smile being induced. On page 15, I appreciate the conclusion to the section on "The Biblical Precedent." In his presentation, Pr. Troup used a helpful antithesis that usefully

reinforced the thesis (the thesis being that humor is to be given to God for his use), namely, that humor should not be used to manipulate the hearer, especially since, as he points out on pages 28ff, the Gospel not humor is what saves. That antithesis could be explicitly stated in the paper. On page 22, I recommend a style correction for the sake of consistency in the paper; that is, I would drop the “Dr.” from “Dr. Peter” except in the initial reference to “Dr. David Peter.” In that same paragraph, but on page 23, I think further clarification is needed to more concretely define and distinguish the roles of proclamation and communication.

Frankly, when I heard that Pr. Troup’s topic was humor in preaching, I had my doubts that the subject was worthy of a D.Min. project. After reading the paper, my mind is completely changed. This paper clarifies the purposes of humor in preaching and, from Scripture and practical experience, provides helpful insight into how best to use (and not use) humor from the pulpit. Pr. Troup’s findings have already been useful to me and, no doubt, will continue to be so as I seek to bring our Lord’s saving Word to God’s people of Christ Our Savior congregation.

HUMOR IN PREACHING:
ITS EFFECTS AND GUIDELINES FOR ITS BENEFICIAL
USE

Reaction paper to Candidate Tony Troup's Major Applied Project
Toward the Degree of Doctor of Ministry

Rev. Stuart Rethwisch

1. Stated under the section *Problem Addressed by the Project* “the purpose of my project is to gather information regarding the effective use of humor in sermons through theoretical research and test this information through qualitative research” (page 5). Organizationally for clarity to the paper, I judge this better to rephrase the sentence to leave out ‘the purpose of’ or move the sentence under the next section on the same page which is entitled: “The Purpose of the Project.”
2. I would have found it helpful as a reader to have clear and distinct definitions of what humor is given in the paper and would strengthen the general argument. For instance, Flesch observed “When you go from the abstract to the concrete, you get humor: your particularize, you turn to people, things, characters, situations. When you go from the concrete to the abstract, you get wit: you generalize, you turn to ideas and words.”¹ Without defining objectively what humor is, the hidden bias of the paper is much harder to define.
3. In Chapter two, it would be helpful to just clearly state at the beginning that the Theological foundation for using humor in preaching is an argument made from Biblical silence on the specific matter investigated, instead of waiting until page 15. To argue by showing from the Biblical foundation of what humor is or that it can be used from what ‘seems’ to make laughter (page 11) or ‘appears playful’ (page 12) or what expression Jesus may have had on his face (page 12) is subjective to interpretation. It seems to be not the most effective reasoning to make the ending statement on the “Biblical Precedent” section “Humor is a power that should be given to God as he chooses” (page 14) and the very next sentence say “the Bible is silent when it comes to the use of humor in preaching and teaching.”
4. In the subsection on joy, the paper said “Joy is the natural response of the sinner whose sins are forgiven for the sake of Jesus Christ” (page 16). On page 11, the paper said “Laughter, it seems, is the Christian’s response to the joy that God grants him through our Savior Jesus.” The introduction related how a charismatic pastor “claimed his laughter “was a manifestation of the Holy Spirit.” Albeit not at the heart of the matter discussed in this paper, a side question to be possibly researched further is: should a pastor laugh during his sermon?
5. In the rhetorical device of humor section, the argument is again from the point that humor is part of rhetoric and methods/techniques of communication and “it would [be] unthinkable not to use them.” In my opinion, this was the strongest argument given in the paper so far. It is an argument drawing from the perceived need of practicality and utility. I would have appreciated more focus of the paper on findings on humor and the practical utility of the hearers’ retention of the message given. Granted, it is suggested on page 33 in relating *Pathos* serving *Logos*, but it is examined in light of the preachers putting “their ‘best self’ forward” as a way to engage the hearer and have them retain. But I’d like the proof from basic communication theory footnoted as this would be helpful in strengthening the argument. In the Aristotle section the example formerly given from “take my intellect and use” would be more credible evidence support to this argument than where it was used under chapter 2.

¹ Rudolph Flesch, *The Art of Clear Thinking* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1951), 52-53.

6. In chapter three, increased credibility would be had if footnotes showed who has made the arguments “humor contributes nothing to the effectiveness” of persuasion (page 25). While stating “most preachers and public speakers” might make the argument above, I would like to see a little bit of the evidence of that truth.
7. In my opinion, the absolutes made on page 30 about ‘everyone’ are hard to prove that in deed, that not any one is separated from. In the same paragraph, the statement: “humor can be a tie that binds” from the evidence overall in the paper given would be more accurate to be “humor can show an unbound people.” My guess is the author wanted to infer the phrase from the hymn “Blest Be the Tie That Binds”.² Yet, if laughter is the result of joy which is the result of forgiveness (unbinding) of sins, then humor should result from forgiven people together. Humor would then not be the uniting cause, but the result. That is how the paper first portrayed humor. Perhaps inadvertently on page 30, the author has now unconsciously combined the two in taking Rainer’s statements as evidence to make his conclusion.
8. On page 32, I caution against the term ‘inspirational’ in reference to non-Christ speakers. Perhaps motivational or emotional would be more accurate use of language.
9. On page 33 on the last paragraph, leave out the word “used properly.” It is a conditional remark not needed in the context of the paragraph.
10. Page 39, first paragraph states: “no great stretch, then, to conclude that humor helps in the retention of sermon points.” Perhaps a more correct conclusion would be that ‘humor may help.’
11. On page 40, the phrase in the top paragraph of the author’s inductive reasoning states that humor’s “use in preaching the Law has beneficial effects.” This conclusion would be strengthened by citing more than just one source as evidence for such a personal conclusion by the author- although he does declare he has not encountered research on humor in preaching by others. What about *lex semper accusat*? To make the argument of the law being beneficial for ‘comic relief’ seems to undermine the narrow sense of the Law to always accuse. I don’t think the author wants to say that it is beneficial to ease the accusing tension the law gives. Perhaps humor’s benefit is that the he who has ears to hear responds from conviction of law by nervous laughter from his own *sitz in leben*.
12. As for the conclusion that humor “can also convey the sweetness of the Gospel”, the narrow and wide sense of the word, as of the law word is to be maintained. The probability for confusion of many readers is found on page 40, not only in the above, but in also using the phrase “convey the *logos itself*”, as the Aristotle and Scripture define what is the *logos* in different ways.
13. Under the heading “Current Views on Appropriate and Inappropriate Humor” the author states “sexual humor is completely inappropriate for the preaching of God’s Word.” Again, not having defined concretely what humor really is, humor seems to be a moving target in this paper. I have used the following statement in a sermon reflecting the world around us and sexual images: men, newspapers and magazines and pop up ads are carried into our homes advertising women in clothes half off, which are advertised half off.” Is this sexual humor? It did evoke a few chuckles so it would be classified as humor, but inappropriate as defined by the author. Yet it was effective in retaining the point so and beneficial in effect (page 40), and would be extolled in increased by rapport with my

² *Lutheran Service Book: Prepared by the Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 649.

hearers' *pathos* (page 30, and 44). And unless you don't define my statement as sexual humor, then the author has stated by my using it "would be a severe detriment to a preacher's life and ministry" (page 44). Yet the paper also states "it is critical that preachers use the best communication skills they can muster in service to God's Word of Law and Gospel" (page 100). This paper would be much more unified if what objectively the author is attempting to define what humor objectively is and how it is distinct from wit. See my point two for one definition that would solve the seeming dilemma I gave.

14. Page 44 seems to have two statements: Almost all humorous people will acknowledge that humor is a very personal thing.... Yet some types of humor have almost universal appeal and far reaching benefits.
15. Page 49 deals with the use of sarcasm and to avoid it. Yet it could reasonably be argued that Jesus himself used sarcasm (white washed tombs-Matt. 23:37) so even sarcasm then is a gift of communication that God has given us. Or is what Jesus said mere exaggeration or hyperbole (page 106)? Or something else possibly meant to be humorous? Again, the point being the need for unchanging definitions used in this paper, which granted, is very difficult and takes much discipline. Other example is the word "gospel"- humor as a tool in service to the gospel (from final recommendations on page 111) and quoting Buttrick "the gospel is ultimately serious, for it speaks of the crucified Christ to the deepest levels of human self-understanding." Clearly, Christ's sacrificial death on the cross [is] no laughing matter" (page 40, sic). Then the author goes into the use of humor in the fruits of the gospel proclamation.

My overall conclusions and reactions to the paper: While humor may be ultimately judged in effectiveness in the mind of the hearer, this paper would be greatly strengthened by an increased discipline in defining what the author specifically judges objectively to be humor early on in the paper. A bit more discipline also in using words such as law and gospel widely or narrowly would be helpful as well as not confusing humor with the law or gospel itself, but the effects of each on the person.

I look forward to seeing what changes the author can make as humor is a first article gift of God included in reason and senses. An unexamined theological point that seems to be against the use of humor for the pathos is St. John the Baptist's declaration of becoming less that Christ should increase (John 3:30). It seems to go directly against the communication theory of being winsome, but, if properly explained, perhaps not. Maybe for the author's next paper on this subject it might be examined.

To go into an unexamined area such as humor in the pulpit takes much preparation and if more experiences could have been drawn from others who have gone before into the same area, the author's task would have been much easier. The subject is worth exploring further.

Humor in Preaching

In reading and assessing the process of this Major Applied Project, I was happy to see the approach used by Pastor Troup. The statement of both assumptions and research methods made clear what was intended and how the measurement would be assessed.

One of the most obvious results of this study, based on the conclusions, is that not all people see the humor in what others consider humorous. The tabulations at the end of the study reflect that unanimity was not possible in every case, yet for most of the participants, the use of humor made the material memorable.

The careful review of rhetorical devices and persuasive speech, as elements of the design in sermons, was beneficial. The study shows careful attention to the tension that exists between the affective nature of speech and the effective spiritual power of the content. As a Lutheran pastor and preacher, Tony was careful to give proper credit for the power of the Word of God, without denigrating the power of words. The fact that God chooses to communicate with words, with written and spoken language, as the primary vehicle for informing shows that the role(s) of words must be respected.

I was also glad to see that the project addressed the non-verbal aspect of the pastor's personality as an element in how humor might be used for positive effect in a sermon. What would be perceived as humor in the preaching of one person could not be seen as in any way funny if used by a pastor who did not normally speak in that manner.

As I reflected on the distinction made between humor serving the Law and its purpose versus the Gospel and its role, I was struck by the need to focus on the patterns provided in sacred scripture. Being acquainted with the personality of the author of this study, I know that he is able to use humor in a natural and appropriate manner. Because he sees application of the Gospel as a serious matter, I do see his need to maintain integrity with attaching humor to the preaching activity. "Humorous preachers are likeable" in a real way. Must one become a more "humorous" pastor outside of the pulpit first in order to be accepted as preaching with humor?

This study made reference to the use of sarcasm as a detrimental mode of attempting humor. I agree that this seems to be the case. The undertone of hostility mentioned very easily would create a greater problem than a bland and less memorable sermon might pose. But I do see a definite application of another literary tool which is alluded to by the study. The ironic use of contrast by Jesus (eye of the needle, beam in one's own eye) drew to my recollection the hyperbole of image that is often used in communicating the Gospel promise and benefits in the Bible.

I suspect that part of the challenge (at least for me, and likely for others) is that the images or terms used have become so familiar that we no longer hear them. Or, to invert the adage, we no longer notice the trees for the forest.

Note Isaiah's reference to cleansing sin's stain and making white that which is dirty by washing. What is the washing agent? In the ritual of sacrifice, it is blood, a staining agent in itself. "As far as the east is from the west" and "drowned in the depths of the sea" are intentional hyperbole, and very possibly meant to also carry a sense of

hilarity in the ironic reversal that the Gospel imparts to sinners. The resultant “joy of Your salvation” is attested to in more than a few Biblical events.

Other elements of humor are evidence in the work of Noah and sons as they built the ark. A century of labor, with the inquisitive neighbors stopping by, is picked up by the comedian Bill Cosby in his routine “Noah” because the humor is already there in the plan God put into action. Aaron’s ludicrous response to his brother regarding the origin of the golden bullock and Isaiah and Jeremiah instructing the Israelites regarding other idols are truly funny once one recognizes the irony these sections contain.

In the preceding paragraph, I merely intend to highlight that use of humor in sermons seems to be not merely permitted but both modeled and endorsed by the Bible in its usage. The nature of God is mirrored in humanity, and laughter and joy are identified as part of the blessing process God gives to both body and soul. Not to use humor, let alone forbid it (after the manner of the Puritans) seems to border on negligence in proper application of the full counsel of God.

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