

Sermon Smiles

Preaching the gospel is a very important job of the preacher. We must make sure we do all we can to communicate salvation to seeking souls, and to nurture and grow those who are Christians.

You may not have been to church in a while. What I say, and what you read today, may bring you to church this Sunday. I hope it will change how you look at the sermon and the preacher.

If you have been a regular attender, you may need a higher perspective on the sermon. We go to church to listen to and praise our God, and to grow, not to see things go exactly the way we want them to be.

So maybe you can share one of the stories below to make someone's day, to give them a smile, as imperfect people called by God work every week to communicate the Gospel in relevant and life-changing ways. We all need to know how to laugh at ourselves.

How long should a sermon be? Some preachers and congregations know. Others have absolutely no idea.

Do you know what it means when a preacher takes his watch off before the sermon, lays it on the pulpit, and begins preaching? Absolutely nothing!

Or maybe we need to adjust to the situation at the moment. Time, temperature, weather, attendance.

One Sunday, snow was three feet deep, but the cowboy went to church. When he entered, he saw that he and the preacher were the only ones there. The preacher asked the cowboy if he wanted him to go ahead and preach. The cowboy said, "I'm not too smart, but if I went to feed my cattle and only one showed up, I'd feed him." So the minister began his sermon. One hour passed, then two hours, then two-and-a-half hours. The preacher finally finished and came down to ask the cowboy how he liked the sermon. The cowboy answered slowly, "Well, I'm not very smart, but if I went to feed my cattle and only one showed up, I sure wouldn't feed him the whole bale!"

And when you get a new preacher, give him a little guidance, and a little time to learn the ropes, as you learn them at the same time.

The new preacher, at his first service had a pitcher of water and a glass on the pulpit. As he preached, he drank until the pitcher of water was completely gone. After the service someone asked an elderly church member, "How did you like the new pastor?" "Fine," she said, "but he's the first windmill I ever saw that was run by water."

Heaven and hell are popular subjects in the pulpit, and it is easy to give impressions just by the preacher's expressions. Let us never be guilty of saying something great with a blank expression, and a minimum of gusto.

A popular preacher was talking to a class of divinity students on the importance of making their facial expressions harmonize with their speech in delivering sermons. "When you speak of heaven," he said, "let your face light up and glow with a heavenly gleam. Let your eyes shine with reflected glory. And when you speak of hell...well, then your everyday face will do."

Our everyday faces can be up there in the pulpit a little too long, and our mannerisms and habits can speak more than our words. Perhaps it is time to examine what we do, how long and how well we do it, and what people actually see.

The sermon is a living, breathing, experience, with God's holy spirit speaking to us in every possible way. So be alert to the expressions, the words, the pauses between phrases when

the spirit can speak. We, as preachers, must pause often, because those spaces between the words are sometimes where God can speak even more clearly.

And finally, this one has to be true. You can't make this stuff up. I can just see the congregation after the pastor has said something big. It's out there, and it can't be taken back. This is familiar territory to any pastor who will admit it..

A preacher was winding up his temperance sermon with great fervor: "If I had all the beer in the world, I'd take it and throw it into the river." And the congregation cried, "Amen!" "And if I had all the wine in the world, I'd take it and throw it in the river." And the congregation cried, "Amen!" "And if I had all the whiskey and demon rum in the world, I'd take it all and throw it in the river." And the congregation cried, "Hallelujah!" The preacher sat down.

The song leader stood up very tentatively and announced: "For our closing song, let us sing hymn #365, 'Shall We Gather at the River?'"

So when the sermon happens, let us look for great things. God has much to show and tell us during all of worship, but particularly during the sermon. Be alert for the humor, divine insight, and miracles which will only happen when God's people and their preachers are ready.