

Willadsen finds humor in life of the parish

Nearly all humor is at the expense of someone.

Self-deprecation – making fun of oneself – is usually funny. But there's the other side. "What is it if you're deprecating someone else? It's mean," Tom Willadsen said.

Willadsen, who last week led the class, "Humor: Tool or Weapon," at Synod School, knows something about humor. In fact, he's written a book about it, "OMG! LOL! Faith and Laughter."

And the difficult task is right in the book's title – combining faith and laughter. But it can be done.

Willadsen, the pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Oshkosh, Wis., looks for humor in the day-to-day life of the Midwestern pastor.

And he finds it. He finds humor, too, in the Bible.

There's the story of the prodigal son. Nearly everyone has heard the story from the perspective of the good son, the bad son or the father. But what about the mother? What is her position in the story? She loves all three of them. Then there's the fatted calf. Not much fun for that one. The humor is in the perspective, Willadsen said.



Tom Willadsen leads "Humor: Tool or Weapon" at Synod School.

And then there are the words of the Israelites speaking to Moses in Exodus 14:11: “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness?”

When it comes to death, Willadsen won’t use the euphemisms – passed away or crossed over. “Death is real,” he said. “Joy is stronger. ... I also believe there is no resurrection without death.”

Writing in the foreword to Willadsen’s book, renowned Lutheran religion scholar Martin E. Marty wrote, “Some may feel he is too grim and prim to be a humorist of any sort in these days ... and too humorous of any sort in these days when pastors are expected to be grim and dim. ... [H]is humor reveals itself mainly in the mere telling of events in parish life and the culture that surrounds it.”

Such was the eulogy of the dirty-joke telling workaholic who in death became the hard worker who always had a story to tell.

Or from the recollections of a music devotee: “He loved music, and opera.”

In the end, though, apart from the importance of perspective and the unexpected to humor, Willadsen said there is a call to be “kind and sensitive.”

Synod School, the weeklong mid-summer ministry of the Synod of Lakes and Prairies, drew more than 550 participants to the Buena Vista University campus in Storm Lake, Iowa, July 26-31.

Willadsen’s book, “OMG! LOL! Faith and Laughter,” can be found online at <http://www.amazon.com/OMG-LOL-Faith-Laughter-Open/dp/1936846314>.