

## ROAST of MICHAEL USEY

### OPENING

BILL: Well, Wayne - - isn't this just great? They have us speaking right after a PhD who lectured at Harvard, another PhD who went to Vanderbilt, and a lady preacher (of all things!) with a Master of Divinity from Princeton.

That kind of planning could only be done by some yahoo from Lexington who still claims she keeps getting pregnant "by accident!"

WAYNE: Well, I think we are exactly who should be speaking next. I earned my degree from the N.C. State Cow College studying why wood is wood and you earned a degree in "BS" by working for the government for 30 years. What could possibly go wrong considering whom we are roasting? In fact, I think we are way over qualified!

BILL: So, do you have any idea about what we are supposed to do up here?

WAYNE: Well I think we are supposed to dream up some oddball stuff and pass it off as the gospel truth and hope nobody knows any different.

BILL: Oh, in other words, just read one of Michael's sermons?

WAYNE: Yeah, but maybe without mangling every two-syllable word.

BILL: Well then, maybe we can do that.

## FIRST MEETING

BILL: I remember when Michael first came to Greensboro 25 years ago. For the first few months before Ann moved to town, Michael stayed in the home of my in-laws, Dan & Mildred Cottrell.

WAYNE: Yeah, I heard that Dan would take in any stray male that hung around his house long enough... (stare at Bill).

Yes, I too remember 25 years ago, but my first recollection happened prior to Michael's arrival.

BILL: Were you on the Pastor Search Committee?

WAYNE: Heck no, we got rid of those losers a long time ago!

An active couple at College Park was to be married on the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday Michael was to preach. They asked for Michael to perform the service that afternoon. The groom was employed by the Keebler Cookie Co. and had asked me to wear a Keebler elf costume the company had and be the ring bearer in the ceremony. (Left hand to heart – right hand raised) Gospel Truth!

BILL: What did you do?

WAYNE: After much consternation, and consulting with a priest, a rabbi, and Reverend Phelps at Westborough Baptist, I declined to be the elf because I didn't know how it would set with the new preacher on his first Sunday here.

BILL: So it turned out OK?

WAYNE: Heck no! Was I ever wrong! If I had known then what I know now, not only would I have been the Keebler Elf, we would have had everybody in the congregation dress up like Sleepy, Grumpy, Dopey, Sneezy, Larry, Moe, Curly, Sylvester, Tweety Bird...

## **HIS MECHANICAL PROWESS**

**BILL:** One of the first things I noticed about Michael is his desire to fit-in with the real men of the church. Right away he started showing up for Building & Grounds work days in order to show his prowess with tools.

**WAYNE:** “Tools” or “fools”?

**BILL:** Either one works, ...(pause)...unlike Michael. It was pretty obvious to us all that his idea of a workday was to go for doughnuts and then vanish 15 minutes later to hold a vital counseling session with whatever knucklehead would let him get within hailing distance.

**WAYNE:** Are you saying that he wasn’t very good at fixing things?

**BILL:** I’m saying that Michael’s idea of doing finish carpentry involves a two-pound sledgehammer and a Buck knife.

## HIS MEMORY

WAYNE: What really impressed me early on was Michael's ability to remember everybody's name after the 1<sup>st</sup> time he met him or her.

BILL: He must have taken one of those Evelyn Woods "Remember Everybody's Name" speed courses.

WAYNE: Probably so. It was only later that we realized he couldn't remember anything unless it WAS a name or he read about it.

BILL: Like where he left his church keys?

WAYNE: Or twice when he left a function and forgot to get his kids before leaving to go home.

I tell you Bill, I would have loved to have been the fly on the wall when Michael would get home, be greeted by Ann and after 5-10 minutes, Ann would ask: Michael honey, where is Zack?

## HIS SERMONS

WAYNE: Bill, have you ever tried to really listen to one of Michael's sermons over these 25 years?

BILL: Nah, Matt and I usually just catch a nap in the narthex before collecting the offering.

WAYNE: Well I tried twice, but since I don't go to movies or read books, I didn't have a clue what he is talking about.

But don't you love how Michael will slip those "forbidden words" into the sermon?

BILL: Like what?

WAYNE: You know, he will be preaching along, half of us with one eye and one ear open and then he'll slip a word in.

"All of a sudden lightening struck and the **semen** came forth" (pause and look around) now you lean over to the person next to you and ask: "what did he just say?" It sounded like Sea Men, as in Navy men. You know his Dad was a Navy man.

Oh no, it sounded like **semen** to me. Why he wouldn't say that in a Baptist church would he?

BILL: Yeah, Michael seems obsessed at times with all things military. I remember one time he used "Whiskey – Tango – Foxtrot" in a sermon, which is the military phonetic slang for "white trash female" or WTF depending on the context.

## HIS THEOLOGY & BOOKS

BILL: Well now that you mention books, I'll tell you a little secret about Michael's grasp of theology. You know how it t seems that his sermons usually explore little known facts concerning the language, context, and history of the Scriptures?

WAYNE: Yeah...

BILL: Well, I used to really marvel at how much color he could add to his message through what seemed to me to be a real depth of understanding on his part.

WAYNE: Do you still feel that way?

BILL: I did until my own daughter graduated from Duke Divinity School, and I discovered that you can buy something called The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary. This is a 20-volume encyclopedia that takes every verse in the Bible and gives you, amazingly, the language, context, and history of the Scriptures.

WAYNE: You're kidding me.

BILL: Nope. Every single sermon you could ever want is right in these books. All you have to do is cut-and-paste, sprinkle in some liberal political balderdash from this week's New York Times, throw in a Frederick Buechner quote, and viola - - you have a Usey sermon.

**(HIS THEOLOGY & BOOKS 2)**

WAYNE: And all this time I thought Michael was a deep thinker!

BILL: Really, Wayne? When by his own admission his most popular sermon is about dead dogs, how deep do you think his independent theology runs? I've seen deeper mud puddles in the desert!

WAYNE: But he does have a lot of books in his office...usually stacked all over the floor.

BILL: Yeah...and every time he goes on a wild spree and cleans that mess up we always get our hopes up that a search committee from another church might be visiting soon.

## WEDDINGS & FUNERALS

WAYNE: Now I will say that while his preaching is all over the map, his one true, God-given gift to us all is his pastoral care. He does do some amazing funerals and weddings.

In fact, he is the only one I want to do my funeral service, except maybe Peggy Haymes, or Dorisanne, or Lin, or Jerry Falwell, or my dog Roscoe.

And even though I probably won't be around to hear Michael do my eulogy, I know he will evermore tell it brother and bring the house down praising my glory!

BILL: I would agree. But did you know that he really likes doing funerals more than weddings?

WAYNE: Really?

BILL: Yep. Preachers seem to keep score on these types of things.

You see, no matter how bad a service Michael preaches at a funeral, 100% of those folks will still be dead in 5 years.

But his luck at performing weddings that last ain't always so great.

## DEACONS

BILL: And speaking of vast, arid wastelands, weren't you on the Deacon Board with Michael?

WAYNE: Why Bill, I sure was. Not once, but twice.

The 1<sup>st</sup> time I was in need of hearing aids, but never acknowledged I could not hear anyone at the meetings. I just showed up, smiled a lot, nodded my head or raised my hand when everybody else did, and when everyone pushed their chair back I knew it was time to leave. I was so glad I could check this of the list of "Things To Do Before Heaven".

The 2<sup>nd</sup> time, I had my hearing aids and oh what a revelation it was.

BILL: How so?

Wayne: Now that I could hear, I realized Michael has no organizational skills, manages by surprise, denies everything, blames the innocent, and couldn't balance a 25-cent budget.

BILL: Yeah, I heard that his relationship with the Deacons was often a challenging test of faith. So much so, that after one three-year term, most DEAC-UNS became DRINK-UNS.

## **BOY SCOUTS**

WAYNE: What does Michael do outside the church? Doesn't he serve on the Eagle Project Review Boards for the Boy Scouts where he reviews and approves projects that Scouts are going to build for their Eagle service project?

BILL: He sure does, and it is a real educational experience. It provides the opportunity for a 15 year old boy to show Michael how to use a hammer.

WAYNE: Aren't Nate and Zach both Eagle Scouts?

BILL: Yes, they are, and I used to be amazed at the variety of topics that they selected to earn their merit badges. They choose cooking, first aid, plumbing, electricity, personal management, and so forth.

And then I realized that they were selecting these topics out of survival desperation, knowing that they would never learn these life skills from their father.

## ATHLETICS

WAYNE: Does Michael have any athletic hobbies?

BILL: Well, actually he does. He has tried to participate in various athletic endeavors, including football, rowing, and playing water polo.

WAYNE: Yeah, I heard that he belongs to a gym and regularly works out.

BILL: Well, I did run into him once at the gym. He was sitting on an exercise bike reading the newspaper. I asked him what he was doing, and he said that he would go home and tell Ann that he was on the bike for 45 minutes!

WAYNE: Doesn't he referee youth soccer games?

BILL: Yep, he sure does. He finally found an activity that matches his athletic abilities. All he has to do is stand around and muster the strength to blow a whistle once in a while and hold up a colored index card occasionally.

About the only real challenge he faces in refereeing soccer is getting Charlotte Tent & Awning to make his uniforms.

## BEE KEEPING

BILL: Have I mentioned that Michael's latest hobby is bee keeping?

WAYNE: How is that going?

BILL: Well, really pretty good. Michael seems to think that it has taught him some real life skills.

WAYNE: How so?

BILL: Well, just the other day he was explaining that if the bee keeper blows enough smoke into the hive, the queen becomes calm and honey is produced.

WAYNE: So?

BILL: Well, everything was OK until he tried that trick with Ann as a romantic prelude...After some of the stupid things he has said about her from the pulpit of the last 25 years, she told him that his bees were giving the only honey he was going to get!

## SERIOUS COMMENTS

BILL: You know, Wayne & I have kidded Michael a bit this evening, but we would be remiss if we didn't acknowledge some of his real talents and gifts.

WAYNE: I agree. So now we would like to do that.

*(Long pause and look at each other in silence, stare at ceiling, scratch head, etc.)*

WAYNE: I have long admired what a learned man Michael is. I joked earlier about incessant reading, but I am awed by how much he reads. To be able to comprehend, quote, and comment on all that he reads is impressive. Bring a topic to Michael and he can discuss it with you and on your level.

BILL: I made fun of Michael's total lack of skills in the building trades, but you have got to say this: he knows what he is good at and where his own talents fall short. And he therefore surrounds himself with other staff and church leaders that complement his skill set.

He might not admit it, but he does live by Dirty Harry's admonition that "a man has got to know his limitations."

WAYNE: I poked fun at serving on the Deaconate, but only after serving, do you get a true understanding of his total grasp of church function and often un-function side of church administration.

## **(SERIOUS COMMENTS 2)**

**BILL:** I also poked fun at Michael's soccer refereeing. But as a former youth hockey ref, I will tell you that Michaels actually personifies what is best in youth officiating.

He uses mature discretion and wisdom in game management; he finds teaching moments both athletically and emotionally for the players; and he helps everyone remember that it really is just a game.

**WAYNE:** We also mentioned that Michael is a leader in the Boy Scouting program.

**BILL:** Yeah, and I've come to see him a fierce defender of the values that Scouting teaches, something that Wayne & I both hold dear. Michael understands that there can never be too many good influences in young men and women's lives, and he is eager to help today's youth grow responsibly into tomorrow's leaders.

**WAYNE:** I can truly say this about Michael. He has a magnificent ability to relate to our youth at College Park. This has been so vital to the spiritual and mental growth of our youth over these 25 years. For me personally, I owe so much to Michael for helping to guide my sons, Phillip and Stephen when I often doubted myself as a teacher, role model, father, or their friend. Thank you Michael.

### **(SERIOUS COMMENTS 3)**

**BILL:** Lastly, I want to close by commenting on Michael's sermons and theology. In truth, the guy really does dumb his sermons down for us. In fact, he is right at home with the distinguished guest speakers that we heard from earlier and could easily teach in divinity school.

On a personal note, I would like to recognize the impact his ministry has had on me. In spite of the politics of the times, I know that he still respects the profession from which I retired, and that he does not judge me by the uniform I wore but by the values I hold.

And speaking of those values, I have to recognize that Michael has been a healthy counter-weight in my beliefs. He has helped to pull, push, and shove me towards the center, where he and I both know the truth usually lives. For that, I guess I owe him everlasting thanks.

**WAYNE:** Sometimes we get asked: who is one person that greatly impacted your life. My Mother was my rod and staff who set me in the right direction. I was 17 when my Dad died. My older brother use to pat me on my head and say: "you just don't understand do you?" I am so indebted to Dr. Roy Carter, my professor/advisor at NC State, for pushing, motivating, and making sure I graduated. But I can clearly answer at this time: several people impacted me, but Michael Usey is right at the top. Thank you Michael for all you have brought to our whole College Park Baptist Church and me for these last 25 years.

But let's not get carried away by toasting for 25 more years.  
Love you Michael!