LAUGH AT THE DEVIL SUNDAY

Have you ever heard of a **Laugh at the Devil Sunday**? I had not, but on March 24, for the first time, I was introduced to this adventure in playful yet profound worship.

You see, on March 24 I had presided and preached for the first time at Gift of Grace Lutheran Worshiping Community in Fernley, NV. After worship some lay leaders approached me and said, “You are next scheduled to be with us on April 28, the Sunday after Easter. We have sometimes celebrated that day as **Laugh at the Devil Sunday**, and we like it. We wear wild, colorful clothes, crazy hats, and mismatched shoes and socks. We sing some fanciful songs, like “Pharaoh, Pharaoh,” and other songs of rescue and resurrection. Last year the pastor wore a wig! Are you willing to lead that worship this year?”

My first reaction was, “Oh, no! The gospel for Easter 2 is so rich with preaching possibilities: ‘Peace be with you;’ ‘As the Father has sent me, so I send you;’ ‘Receive the Holy Spirit (it’s John’s Pentecost!);’ ‘If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven them;’ ‘Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have come to believe.’ So many profound preaching possibilities,” I thought, “and they want to do some frothy, silly, funny stuff in worship?”

My second reaction was healthier. “Pay attention to these lay people,” I thought, “who seem to have found meaning in this. I should be open to trying new things, especially playful new things.” So I agreed to go along with this strange idea and plan.

As I prepared for that Sunday, I guessed that some smart, creative worship planner had come up with this idea as a strategy for dealing with the usual abysmally low attendance on Easter 2. And I remembered an obscure bit of atonement theology I had heard some years ago, which proclaims that on Easter God pulled a colossal trick on the devil. God had offered the devil a deal: “You give me back my Christians, my believers, and I will give you my Son...
to do with whatever you like.” So the devil had his day, his Good Friday, killed God’s Son, and released from bondage all those who had been in the devil’s prison of sin and death. But on Easter God tricked the devil, snatching Jesus from the grip of death and restoring him to the divine life. The devil fell victim to his own hubris, believing himself an equal bargaining partner with God. As I reflected on all this I imagined God on Easter laughing at the devil and saying, “Neener! Neener! Neener! Christ is risen!”

So the somewhat feared, much anticipated Sunday came. The church was filled with helium balloons. Gift of Grace people arrived, some in crazy hats, some with brightly colored clothing, some with mismatched shoes and/or socks, and some (after all, these are Lutheran people!) in normal Sunday attire. I wore a brightly colored stole, one brown sandal and one black, mismatched colorful socks, short pants, a prized “Papa” tee shirt, but no outlandish wig (too hot for me).

The service went well. The songs were joy-full. The sermon was shorter than usual, even though I managed to touch briefly all those “profound” bases in John 20:19-31. But the highlight of the sermon (and of the morning, for me) came when, early in the sermon and then after each sub-section, I invited the congregation to join me in laughing at the devil; we held our thumbs up to our ears, wiggled our fingers and said, “Neener! Neener! Neener! Christ is risen!” Everyone got into that!

Playful and profound. Very appropriate for Easter 2. Try it; you’ll like it. And maybe, after a few years of a new “tradition,” you will find more folks showing up for worship on that “low Sunday.”

by Pr. Carl Wilfrid
(for more, google “Holy Humor Sunday” or “Bright Sunday”)

Do you have a story that you would like to share? Send any Church Together story requests to mic@spselca.org.