

IMAGINE THE SURPRISE!
Acts 2:14, 22-32; I Peter 1:3-9
Holy Hilarity Sunday

Today, the first Sunday after the Day of Resurrection, was, in the early church, celebrated as Holy Hilarity Sunday. Sadly, this tradition slipped away but has been revived by some denominations in recent years. The theology is sound for such a celebration. Imagine the surprise when God overcame death and Jesus was raised from the dead! Where oh grave is thy victory? Where oh death is thy sting?

God is the victor and death is no more!

Many American churches are resurrecting this old Easter custom begun by the Greeks in the early centuries of Christianity- "Holy Humor Sunday" celebrations of Jesus' resurrection on the Sunday after Easter. For centuries in Eastern Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant countries, the week following Easter Sunday, including "Bright Sunday" (the Sunday after Easter), was observed by the faithful as "days of joy and laughter" with parties and picnics to celebrate Jesus' resurrection. Churchgoers and pastors played practical jokes on each other, drenched each other with water, told jokes, sang, and danced. The custom was rooted in the musings of early church theologians (like Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa, and John Chrysostom) that God played a practical joke on the devil by raising Jesus from the dead. "*Risus paschalis* - the Easter laugh," the early theologians called it. In 1988 the Fellowship of Merry Christians began encouraging churches and prayer groups to resurrect Bright Sunday celebrations and call it "Holy Humor Sunday," with the theme: "Jesus is the LIFE of the party." Many churches from different traditions responded enthusiastically. Holy Humor Sunday services are bringing back large crowds to churches on a Sunday when church attendance typically drops dramatically. If you Google "Holy Humor Sunday" on the Internet, you'll be amazed at how widespread Holy Humor Sunday celebrations on the Sunday after Easter have become among churches of all traditions. It's clearly a movement of the Holy Spirit to shore up belief in the resurrection of Jesus. Both the religious and secular press are now reporting on this phenomenon.

So.... We begin by remembering that God does have a sense of humor and loves children:

After the birth of their child, an Episcopal priest, wearing his clerical collar, visited his wife in the hospital. He greeted her with a hug and a kiss, and gave her another hug and kiss when he left. Later the wife's roommate commented: "Gee, your pastor sure is friendlier than mine."

One day after a worship service, a preacher announced:

"The class on prophecy has been canceled due to unforeseen circumstances."

In the middle of a long-winded sermon, a small child was overheard asking his mother in a whisper that we heard for a few pews around: "Mommy, are you sure this is the only way we can get into heaven." A family invited some people to their home for dinner. At the table the mother turned to their six-year

old son and said, "Would you like to say the blessing?" The son replied, "Ah, mom, I don't know what to say?"

"Just say what you hear Mommy say," she replied.

So the little boy bowed his head with everyone else and said, "Lord, why on earth did I invite all these people dinner. Amen."

A pastor friend put sanitary hot air hand dryers in the rest rooms at his church but after two weeks he had them removed. A colleague asked him why and he confessed that they worked fine but when he went in one of the restrooms, hung by the hand dryer was a sign that read, "For a sample of this week's sermon, push the button."

An inexperienced preacher was to hold a graveside burial service at a pauper's cemetery for an indigent man with no family or friends. Not knowing where the cemetery was, he made several wrong turns and got lost. When he eventually arrived an hour late, the hearse was nowhere in sight, the backhoe was next to the open hole, and the workmen were sitting under a tree eating lunch. The diligent young pastor went to the open grave and found the vault lid already in place. Feeling guilty because of his tardiness, he preached an impassioned and lengthy service, sending the deceased to the great beyond in style. As he returned to his car, he overheard one of the workman say to the other, "I've been putting in septic tanks for twenty years and I ain't never seen anything like that."

Going over our church finances I found a receipt from a local paint store signed by someone named Christian. I wasn't aware of anyone buying paint, so I called the store to point out its mistake. "I'm sorry," I told the manager, "but there are no Christians here at First Baptist Church."

- 1 RE-Joice... He is Risen... Indeed!
- 2 RE-Fresh... your body by sound sleep and good eats!
- 3 RE-New... acquaintances and habits of health and hope!
- 4 RE-Deemed... Know that you are loved forever by the Lord!
- 5 RE-View... your past lumps and bumps... and know you're forgiven!
- 6 RE-Late... Talk, and listen closely, to those around you!
- 7 RE-Store... "unto me a clean heart, O God." (Psalm 51:10)
- 8 RE-Vive... your faith through the Word and Sacraments!
- 9 RE-Focus... on all the great gifts the Lord has given you!
- RE-Member... those special people around you!

Benediction

As you go from here,
may God—our source of our hope—
fill you up completely with joy and peace
so that you overflow with hope
by the power of the Holy Spirit!