

Column

Not only do “kids say the darndest things,” but the darndest things happen in church. That, at least, has been my experience, and I suspect the experience of most clergy and lay workers. Maintaining a sense of humour and keeping the perspective of eternity in God’s house is absolutely essential, as I hope three examples from my own personal experience will show.

My first comes from over a third of a century ago in a church in Birmingham, Ala. Clergy and choristers were lined up at the rear of the building waiting to go in for the morning service. At the head of the procession was a little boy carrying a cross. As the organist ended her prelude, the little boy said in a voice audible to the whole congregation, “I’ve got to go to the bathroom.” Of course, we had to wait.

No harm was done. The organist resumed playing and eventually, as my mother used to say, “we got the show on the road”. The congregation left not only with the blessing that comes from being in the Lord’s house on the Lord’s Day, but a story to tell to boot!

My second example also involves a delay. This one took place at a wedding. As is the case with most nuptial celebrations, this one had been preceded with much preparation. A family member had spent months sewing Elizabethan costumes for not only the bride and groom but for all members of the wedding party.

The hitch came when the time for the wedding arrived and no groom. A message was passed to the organist to keep playing, which she did for an additional 20 or 30 minutes. Finally, I dismissed members of the congregation and sent them downstairs to the reception.

After about an hour, the groom appeared. The reason for his tardiness -- you can’t make this up -- his mother had kidnapped him in an attempt to keep him from marrying his beloved. With the groom

present, the congregation reassembled in the church, and the ceremony went forward.

The good news is that this rocky start did not keep this couple from having a happy marriage, one that continues to this day. Moreover, the passing of time has opened the door for laughing at this almost-fiasco.

My third and final example, likewise, involves a service of worship. No sooner had it begun, I glanced over at the pulpit and noticed that my sermon notes were missing. I whispered to an acolyte, “Go quickly to my office and bring the sheets of paper lying on the desk.”

Five minutes later, he came back with a stack as tall as the Sears and Roebuck catalogue. My sermon notes were not among them. So, I sent him back a second time. Meanwhile, notices for upcoming events were given and a hymn -- thank goodness a long one -- was sung. On the final stanza, the boy returned, this time with the right sheets of paper. All was well.

Not all the missteps in life, including those that happen at church, can be laughed away, but humour and perspective can get us over many humps in the roadway of life and enable us to carry on. The humour of which I am thinking allows us to find the comic element in situations and people, especially in ourselves. It’s constructive and cathartic.

In Philippians 4:4, Paul says: “Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice.” I don’t think he would mind a bit if we pencilled in: “Yes, even in those crazy things that happen at church!”

O ALMIGHTY God, who alone canst order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men; Grant unto thy people, that they may love the thing which thou commandest, and desire that which thou dost promise; that so, among the sundry and manifold changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed, where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (The Book of Common Prayer)

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