

“Low Sunday”

The Resurrection of Our Lord is the crowning point of the liturgical year. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 14:15, “...and if Christ has not been raised, the our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain.” We give it everything we’ve got. For musicians, this usually brings with it weeks or months of stressful planning, preparation, and budget-stretching. We might even think (or say), “I’ll be glad when all this is over.”

What happens on the Second Sunday of Easter? Do we take a breather (or a vacation)?

In various traditions, including the Roman Catholic and Anglican, this Sunday has come to be known as “Low Sunday.” Some claim this is because of its position as the second Sunday in the octave of Easter, secondary to the “high” festival of Easter Sunday. Others understand the word “low” to have been derived from the Latin “Laudes,” the first word in the Sarum Rite sequence for this day.¹

Today in some Protestant circles, the term seems to suggest a more casual day of worship, with the assumption that attendance will be light. A Lutheran church posted this to its Facebook page a few years ago: “Today is traditionally called Low Sunday in the church. Why? Because it’s supposedly the least-attended Sunday of the church year.” The post concludes hopefully, “Buck the trend!”

Other Protestant congregations also designate the Sunday after Easter as “Holy Humor” or “Holy Hilarity” Sunday. People are encouraged to bring little bells from home to ring whenever the word “Alleluia” is sung or heard. Jokes are told. Pastors or their pets dress in costumes; a recent Newsday story had a photo a dog seated in the chancel next to the pastor.² This is fueled, we learn from newsletters and blogs, by the centuries-old designation of this day as “Bright Sunday”—although it was originally “Bright Monday”—on which early Greek Christians celebrated God’s last laugh on the devil by raising Jesus from the dead. (I made a concerted attempt to track down the original source for this but could not.)

How about bucking *this* trend? Continue to celebrate Easter “with high delight” through music using the best and finest resources available. In so doing we welcome our congregations once again to sing the stirring “O Sons and Daughters of the King” as the hymn of the day (LSB 471 and LBW 139) or “O Sons and Daughters, Let Us Sing” (ELW 386) in response to the John 20:19-31 gospel text.

You might sing lively Easter hymns not featured the previous Sunday. These could include ELW 375, “Alleluia! Christ Is Arisen” (“¡Aleluya! Cristo resusitó!”), with the refrain sung in Spanish; “Alleluia! Jesus Is Risen,” LSB 474 and ELW 377, a splendid text that some have joked was Herbert Brokering’s

attempt to atone for “Earth and All Stars”; “Christ Has Arisen, Alleluia,” LSB 466 and ELW 364, a re-telling of the Easter story ideal for one week out; or “The Risen Christ,” ELW 390, enlivened by Walter Greatorex’s soaring tune. You could also engage a few handbell players in random ringing on selected hymn stanzas.

Another idea, borrowing from Kevin Hildebrand’s column elsewhere in this issue, is to deploy instrumentalists who didn’t play on Easter Sunday. You might also recruit an intergenerational “Family Choir” specifically for this day. They can sing simple unison or two-part arrangements with just a couple of rehearsals, or they can simply sing right out of the hymnal to jazzed-up accompaniments. No one will expect perfection. Family Choir will be fun for everyone and will help with attendance, too!

Be faithful, be creative, and persevere in exercising the fullness of the gifts God has given you in service of the church. This is what will make worship truly bright.

1. It’s also been called Quasimodo Sunday from the first words of the Latin Introit, taken from 1 Peter 2:2: “Quasi modo geniti infantes, rationabile, sine dolo lac concupiscite” (“As newborn babes, long for the pure, spiritual milk...”).

2. Found at <http://www.newsday.com/long-island/holy-humor-sunday-lights-up-congregations-1.3658053>.