

thESource *Skit*

Six Shades of Purple by Dean Nadasy Lent 1: Our Church

For Lent 1, based on Luke 4:1-13

Focus: People in church are not always what they seem. They have their wildernesses where struggles with sin, death, and the devil thrive. Still, they are victorious people in Christ.

Characters:

Usher - inviting; homespun; has depth and compassion
Tyler - 16 years old, searching for an answer
Frieda - in her 70's; full of self-pity
Max - business-type; appears more sure of himself than he is
Sarah - uneasy; looking for a way out
Pastor - robed and in place

Setting: Your church in its regular morning worship service. A person who has served as an usher as people arrived now "steps into" the service in the style of the Stage Manager in Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*. Characters may be played by young people or by appropriate members of the congregation. They sit on chairs staggered about the front of the church. Their hymnals are open. The pastor sits in his normal place. A spotlight (over-head projectors work well here) that moves from person to person would enhance the action.

Usher: *(enters up center aisle as the singing of a hymn concludes.)* Real fine, folks. We're sounding better and better. Don't know how long you've been here, but was a time when the organ out-sounded the singing around here. Singing has a way of outdoing just about everything if you think about it. Why, hearing you sing, you'd think the world was gilded royal, and you and I aren't much different from the angels! Well, I suppose we have our better moments, you and I, when we climb the heights and keep company with archangels; but underneath the hallelujahs, deep down under the saintly smiles we see around here, are struggles never seen but by the soul that bears them. *(Has lapsed off; gathers himself)* Don't mean to depress you this morning. But come along. I'll show you what I mean. *(Spotlight to Tyler; Usher walks over to stand behind Tyler, who remains frozen with hymnal open.)* Tyler here is 16. Plays football fairly well, enough to play every game over at the high school last fall. You can tell when Tyler walks into church on Sunday. Every young gal's head turns—one or two, by the way, more than others. He's a popular boy, Tyler is. Truth is, people tend to put him on a pedestal. The All-American Boy.

Most of you know that Tyler's dad passed away last year. What you don't know is what goes on inside of Tyler even all these months later. His mother knows, though. Shes heard it, how hard it is for Tyler to understand. Listen.

Tyler: *(comes to life; stands as if talking to mother)* I don't get it, Mom. Dad gives all he's got for the church, and then God lets him die. It isn't fair. We prayed, all of us. It just seems like there ought to be some kind of pay off for a guy like Dad. *(pauses)* Oh, I know, there's heaven. But he never saw me grow up all the way. I never told him how much I loved him. Mom, why didn't God do something? Didn't He know how much I would miss Dad? *(returns to chair; opens hymnal; into frozen position; spot from Tyler to Frieda)*

Frieda: *(hers is a rocking chair; she begins rocking here and speaks with obvious self-pity)* Sometimes being dead is better than being alive. I'm not doing much good for anybody here. Might win a rock-a-thon, I guess. *(chuckles audibly; sarcastically)* And now our winner, Frieda Schulmann, who has rocked in this same chair day in and day out for the last 10 years! Let's hear it for Frieda, folks!... Nothing. Does anybody know that Frieda's here? Is anybody listening? *(Usher moves beside her; Frieda freezes with hymnal open; no longer rocks)*

Usher: We're listening, Frieda. *(to audience)* Get my meaning, folks? The struggle 'neath the hallelujahs. Cross-bearing, some might call it. The temptation to give it up for an easier way. *(walks over to Max; spot from Frieda to Max)* You know, I've heard it said that for every mountain there's a valley. Take Max here. Most of you know Max as a leader in our church. Why, I don't know if there's a position in this congregation that Max hasn't held.

Last Friday, Max squeaked a deal through at work that was a little shady. *(pauses to catch audience's reaction)* Oh, I know, not Max! And Max himself can't believe it. He's doing what you might call fudging... on God...on himself. It isn't easy to face God or yourself, when you've given in to temptation. Max's argument runs something like this.

Max: *(stands in front of mirror placed near his chair)* Max Robinson, you're not all you think you are. You knew right well that property would depreciate in value within 10 years. Why didn't you tell him that... He should have known it, though. You don't buy property without checking it out thoroughly. The responsibility was his, not mine... I'll never see the guy again anyway. I think he kind of liked me... Well, I'll make up for it on the next deal... Hope it works out for him, though. *(returns to chair; opens hymnal; freezes; spot from Max to Sarah)*

Sarah: *(stands and speaks as if to her husband)* Bill, I don't know if I can go on. I need room to breathe. I'm tired of it all, the kids, the house, the stores, the wash. Can't we just say it's been a good 10 years and leave each other alone? All we do is fight. *(pauses as if for response)* No! If we can't settle it ourselves, I'm sure not going to see some counselor! You can do better than me anyway, Bill. I just have to start over again. It isn't working the way I had thought it would. *(returns to chair; opens hymnal; Usher walks to stand beside her)*

Usher: So the struggle, from one soul to the next. And you can drape a soul in long white robes and christen it a "Reverend," *(walks over to pastor; spot to pastor)* but still the tempting and the cross are there. The pastor climbs into his pulpit to give his weekly dosage of the Word to heal the ills of humankind. *(Pastor moves to pulpit and opens Bible)* But in that one brief moment before he reads his text and speaks with some authority, he wonders with words that for once we can hear...

Pastor: I wonder if they'll listen today... There's Louise. She'll listen. She's always waiting for me to slip up on something... And Frank there... You want a pillow Frank?... Do any of them know what I paid for this sermon, the hours away from Sue and the kids?... I've got to talk to Sue about that time away from home. I know it's getting to her... Well, here goes. Lord? Forgive the lazy preparation! Forgive the shortcuts!.. Oh, why apologize? I'm three steps above the preacher up the street... Sue? Are you going to listen today? Are you?... *(smiles a pastoral smile)* Grace, mercy, and peace to you... *(freezes at pulpit; spot to Usher center-stage; Pastor returns to chair)*

Usher: So there it is, our church, or some small sample of the struggles we have with sin and death and the devil. *(chuckles)* Even preachers know about such things! We all have our stories, every one. Yet we are all here Sunday by Sunday, singing to be heard. We whisper in the wind of the Spirit that somehow again this Sunday we will hear some word, say some prayer, touch some miracle that will help us sing again come next Lord's Day. That is the saving grace of all of this, that we are together here in hope, that we can believe once more that for every valley there is a mountain. Sure. This is how it is. "This is the way we are: in our growing up and in our marrying and in our living and in our dying." *(The congregation sings "Blest Be the Tie that Binds," as spot moves from character to character.)*

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