

Incompatible Joy
Luke 19:28-40
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April 1, 2007

Something you may not know about me is that I used to love to watch Nick at Nite. I love all those shows like *Bewitched* and *I Dream of Jeannie* and *Green Acres*. So when I was thinking about Palm Sunday, the first thing that came to my mind was the *Mary Tyler Moore Show*. I hope I'm not alone in this room in being able to recall with absolute clarity the show when Chuckles the Clown died. Sadly, Chuckles, while dressed as a peanut had been killed by a rogue hungry elephant in a parade. At the funeral, Mary cannot contain herself and bursts out laughing during the pastor's sermon. She absolutely can't stop. She tries to disguise it with coughing or clearing her throat, but a loud guffaw erupts from her with a full-on, mouth wide open, inappropriateness. I can empathize with Mary. Now, I've never laughed out loud at funeral but I have been known to get the occasional uncontrollable laughing fit complete with eyes running tears. Definitely sometimes without reasonable cause. Apparently laughing at inappropriate times is one of those things that most of us have done at one time or another. And thanks to our trusty internet, I even found some tips for controlling such outbursts (from www.wikihow.com):

1. Understand when it is inappropriate to laugh. If you go into a situation knowing that it's not laughable, it'll help you maintain a more serious demeanor.
2. If you see someone else laughing inappropriately (and everyone else giving that person dirty looks) then get away from them as quickly as possible, because inopportune laughter can be infectious.
3. Think of something very sad and depressing. If you need inspiration, the daily news is usually full of unfortunate events that will suffice to calm you down. Think about something that makes you want to cry. Although this can be unpleasant, it usually takes care of the uncontrollable urge to laugh.
4. Disguise a smile or laugh with a coughing fit. If a grin or chuckle slips through, quickly cover it up by putting your hand over your mouth and coughing. Move

- away from the crowd, even if it means stepping out of the room or going to the restrooms. If they see you are coughing, they will understand.
5. Force yourself to turn your laugh into a cry if the occasion is something sad such as a funeral. Some people sound like they are laughing before they cry.
 6. Try exhaling as much of the air as possible from your lungs. This removal of the air will not allow the laugh to continue and make it stop. This usually works best when combined with the coughing technique mentioned above.
 7. If it gets really bad, hold your nose and cover your mouth with that hand. Then people can't see your grin, and you can laugh as hard as you wish inside yourself. You may start shaking, but that's ok, it can be covered as crying. Try not to let any sound out, but if you do ease up by accident it sounds much like a sneeze or a strange snort.
 8. If none of the above work, then get away to a private area (e.g. a restroom) and let it out. Return to what you were doing after you're done.

Here's the thing about Palm Sunday, like Mary laughing inappropriately, we celebrate Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem and sing and cry "Hosanna!" quite cheerfully, knowing quite well that we are facing a week of suffering and of death well before we reach the resurrection a long week from now. Our joy today is incompatible with our knowledge of the Holy Week we are about to travel through. So why do we choose to celebrate today? Why not follow these handy internet steps to stopping our laughter? We've been in the desert with Jesus, observing Lent, for almost 6 weeks. Certainly we can hold out another week and just not laugh inappropriately today! Leo Tolstoy said, "Pure and complete sorrow is as impossible as pure and complete joy." So maybe it's not quite as incompatible as I first thought.

We attempt to go through the events of Holy Week as if we were there with Jesus and his first disciples. We want to experience all of this week as if it were our first time from Jesus' entry into Jerusalem enveloped with joy to the Last Supper in the Upper Room to following him while he carries the cross on his back through the streets of Jerusalem to being with him at the moment of his death. Without encountering all of this, we miss what this season can really mean. We keep ourselves distant so that we only

connect emotionally to the resurrection. Without going through this week, beginning with today, our joy really would be incompatible with Easter Sunday. It would be an empty joy celebrating new life without understanding the complexities of the death, which bring that new life.

And so, here we are, laughing as we should, on Palm Sunday. Today is a joyful day! Jesus rode into Jerusalem amid the cries of the whole multitude of the disciples who are praising God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power they had seen, saying “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!” I feel like before we can really understand our own joy this morning, we need to know why this multitude was so happy. Luke tells us they had seen deeds of power. Certainly by this time if they had not actually been able to see deeds of power through the crowds that follow this man around, they have heard of it. We read of Jesus healing people, feeding people, teaching people, calming the sea. Everywhere he goes, crowds follow him. This time he rides into Jerusalem down the Mount of Olives and is greeted by more people, all who follow him spiritually, waiting to be there as his feet trod the path the Messiah is expected to tread. A new book, out last year, by Marcus Borg and Dominic Crossan explains that not only is this why people were so excited, but also there was another procession entering Jerusalem that day, too. This second procession was of Pontius Pilate. Those who were greeting Jesus were greeting the peace of the kingdom of God, those who were greeting Pilate were greeting the oppression of the Roman Empire. Jesus is such a rebel.

I find it interesting that these disciples are gathered to welcome Jesus’ anti-empirical procession into Jerusalem and follow his rule rather than Ceasar’s and yet they

cry out, “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heaven!” It’s as if they still don’t believe that Jesus was really bringing peace to them, where they are. Actual peace not Roman oppressive peace. Why don’t they call out, “Peace on earth!”? Why don’t we call out, “Peace on earth!”? In some ways, we, just like the disciples, find it almost impossible to imagine peace in our midst. We know so much war and so much poverty and so much inequality. It makes sense for peace to be in heaven, but not peace on earth. The word, “Hosanna!” which we cry out and sing this morning comes from the Hebrew “hosha’na” which means, “God save us!” and is called out by our Jewish brothers and sisters at Sukkot. Today as we joyfully welcome Jesus into our midst, triumphing over the oppressive peace that is offered to us by our worldly authorities, let us cry out with joy and expectation, “God save us! Peace on earth!” Unlike the disciples, we really do know that the kingdom of God is possible because every year we have experienced the Resurrection. Don’t forget the promise this morning as we enter Holy Week, enter with joy, expecting peace, know that God does save us.

Today we have Communion, not just because it’s the first Sunday of the month, but because we know that we come to Christ’s table with the incompatible joy of celebration when we know full well that death is around the corner. It makes so much sense to celebrate Communion on Palm Sunday, it’s such a beautiful example of all we hold in tension today. So I invite you, as you hear the invitation to this table knowing that the Holy Spirit has blessed it and is with it, take this food as fuel for the spiritual journey of the week ahead. Take this food with joy, knowing all that will be. Laugh if you are so moved - joy is always present on Palm Sunday and it is well-placed. Jesus has come to show a new way to peace not just in heaven where we expect it to be, but also on earth,

where it takes us by surprise. If we silence our laughter and joy this morning, the stones around us would shout out to make sure we know who it is who has come and that he has brought the kingdom of God with him.