

Being Obnoxious

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Luke 19:28-40

"...the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully..."

Palm Sunday

Movement 1 – Tight-Lipped Christians

How do you express joy? How do you express happiness, excitement, and feelings of glee? How do you express joy? I remember when I once saw a production of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and in this production the actor who played Malvolio did a wonderful job especially in expressing joy – in a particular way. Malvolio is a matter-of-fact, no nonsense, cut to the chase, and keep your emotions close kind of guy. He is someone that seldom smiles and seldom cries and expresses joy with a great amount of reserve. I remember a particular scene when he finds a factitious letter said to have been written by the women he serves whom he secretly adores. In this letter the woman he longs to love is gushing about how much she is in love with Malvolio, and how much she would love to see him full in yellow, crossed garters leggings. The letter was an answer to Malvolio's dreams and fantasies. It was a gift from heaven, and as he expressed his excitement, his amazement, and his joy, you could hear his voice getting higher, his pace was quickening, a small giggle would escape, and it seemed that he was about to explode. It was at the point of losing all of his control when he reeled himself in, steadied himself, took a breath, and said with a straight face, with a deep voice, and with a monotone delivery, "I am happy."

How do you express your joy? Do you share it in the same way as Malvolio, hiding and concealing your emotions? Do you subdue your praise; do you keep your "hosannas" to yourself? How do you express your joy? Some let their joy fly freely, not holding back, bubbling and bouncing with large smiles and overflowing enthusiasm. Others fashion themselves after a kind of Victorian age sensibility and feel that an expression of emotions that is uncontrolled is unseemly. Some go further and fashion themselves after the Stoics who feel that it is best to try to control all of your emotions no matter what. Some people just want to avoid looking stupid, don't want to seem obnoxious, and keep their joy to themselves. How do you express joy?

This week and next week are some of the few times that we are called to be joyous as Christians. It is one of the few times that we, especially those of us in the mainline Protestant churches, can shout in church. It is not a normal thing, it is not a natural thing, yet we are given licensed to shout in church, because the time is exciting. Yet often our "hosannas" are strained, and our cries that "Christ is risen indeed" feels forced and contrived. We hold our hands halfway in the air, we cautiously wave our palms, and we mumble "hosanna" and that is supposed to be the expression of our joy for the year.

When did it become ok to be a tight-lipped Christian holding back our expressions of our joy? When did it become the accepted norm and the expected norm to keep our praise and hosannas so quiet and reserved? If we could travel in time, I can almost imagine Christians from the late 20th and early 21st century standing on the road to Jerusalem, watching Christ go by, hearing others say, "Hosanna" and offering little more than a polite golf clap, as if passively watching a parade. We would say, "Hosanna," but under our breath so our neighbor wouldn't hear, so we would not be seen as obnoxious, and so we wouldn't embarrass ourselves. We would express our joy, but in a secret, covert way so that others will not be aware. In private, in

isolation, we would offer our praise to Jesus. Is this how you express joy? How do you express joy?

Movement 2 – The Proper Way to Express our Joy

Or perhaps the question should be, “how do you express your faith?” How do you share your faith in Jesus? How do you tell other people that you are a Christian? How do you live your faith? How do you express your faith in Jesus?

If you are like many of us, you keep your faith to yourself. Maybe it was because you grew up in a time when it was assumed that everyone went to church, and you did not feel it was necessary, or appropriate to talk about religion. Or maybe you are sensitive to the pluralistic context of today, the multiplicity of religions, faiths, and opinions, and you want to refrain from offending someone else. Or maybe you were brought up in a place where people who shared about their faith openly were seen as different and perhaps a bit odd, and you don’t want to be labeled as a “weirdo.” Maybe you would say, “Pastor, my close friends know that I am a Christian, but I don’t want to be obnoxious about it.” Maybe you say, “pastor, everyone I know is also a Christian, so there is no reason to be sharing my faith all of the time.” Maybe you say, “pastor, I’m just not sure what to say.” Maybe you aren’t sure if you will say the right thing and you may completely misrepresent Christianity. How do you express your faith?

What is it that keeps us from sharing openly? I mean telling our friends, our relatives, our neighbors that you follow Jesus, and what that means to you. I mean telling someone that you will pray for them and why? I mean being obvious about your convictions that come from your faith. How do we express our faith? What is the formula, what is the proper approach? How should we express our faith?

Think about those who are tight-lipped Christians, not just with our hosannas, but with our entire relationship with Jesus? Maybe they claim that they do not want to be obnoxious, maybe they claim that they do not want to lose their relationships with their friends if they expressed their faith. Yet I wonder if one ends up living two lives, the Sunday life and the rest of your life. I wonder if the tight-lipped Christians live with a kind of dichotomy within themselves, trying to keep the two lives separate.

It reminds me of the movie *Tootsie*. In this movie the main character, played by Dustin Hoffman, is living two different lives, one as a man and one as a woman, and trying to keep both of them in balance. As a woman he becomes a close friend to another woman that as a man he is interested in. You can see the uncomfortable tension in Hoffman’s character as he, as a man, is trying to open up and get to know this woman, and at the same time, as a woman, tries to keep his secret to himself. So he listens as a woman and tries to speak well of himself as a man, without revealing the fact that he is a man. Does that sound dizzying? How many live their life as a Christian in a similar way? You try to speak well of Christians, without revealing you are a Christian, or at least letting people think that you are some kind of fanatical nut who would run around throwing your clothes on the street, shouting “hosanna,” and it is dizzying.

How do you express your faith? Are you cautious with your sharing? Are you hesitant with your praise? Have you put a bushel over the light, have you shied away from loving Jesus out loud? Would you wear a shirt that says, “Jesus is my love machine,” or would you be too embarrassed? How do you express your faith? The late philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein claimed that our speech and our language is our reality and that if you were truly a Christian, your speech and your actions would reflect your faith. Yet he saw many closed-lipped, cautious Christians in the world not sharing their faith and he saw this manner of living as contradictory.

There is even a story of one of his close associates claiming he was a Christian, and Wittgenstein stood up, looked at him and said, “no you aren’t, because if you were a Christian than you would have told me by now.”

How do you share your faith? Do you share your faith openly or do you keep it to yourself. Are you scared, are you embarrassed, or are you shy. How do you express your faith?

Movement 3 – The Obnoxious Disciples

Today, in the scripture read during the service, we hear the disciples sharing their faith, and they are not holding back in any way at all. The disciples are giving us a model, an example to follow in expressing our faith. The disciples show us a way to share our faith.

The scholar Fred Craddock points out that in Luke’s version of Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem, in Luke’s version of “Palm Sunday,” it is only the disciples, the followers of Jesus, who are offering praise: “the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice...” This isn’t a picture of the whole city stopping everything and praising Christ. This isn’t a scene where Jesus is causing mayhem with his entrance. It is not the *Jesus Christ Superstar*, or *Godspell*, picture of everyone praising Jesus, but instead a small group of people gathered around an individual, making a commotion, being obnoxious and praising Christ. Imagine a hustling and bustling entryway into Jerusalem. Everyone is going where he or she wants to go and paying no mind to anyone else. Yet all of a sudden, from the distance comes Jesus, riding a donkey, as if to fulfill scripture from Zechariah, and surrounded by a band of fishermen, farmers, tax collectors, and other mismatched groupies all shouting and throwing their cloaks before Jesus. They are echoing the proclamation that the angels declared at Jesus’ birth saying, “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heaven!” It is an obnoxious display of pageantry disrupting the normal everyday life of Jerusalem. Yet the city does not stop for Jesus. Maybe some in the crowd stop to see what all the commotion is about, but maybe others keep walking, trying to get to their destination. Maybe others turn a curious head to see why everyone is yelling. And then, like the concerned friend trying to tell you that you have had too much to drink and you are making a fool of yourself in front of everyone, the Pharisees try to tell Jesus to stop making a scene, stop being so obnoxious, and try to fit with the rest of the people.

Imagine it today. Imagine you are downtown, right in Center City, right next to City Hall, by the giant clothespin. You are watching people coming and going, minding their own business and trying to get on with the goings of life, when out of the 15th street subway you hear a noise and see a commotion. One person is walking up the steps to the street, and is surrounded by a large group of people shouting praise and hosanna. These people don’t seem to care that others are watching and gawking. These people don’t seem to care that some are trying to get around them, clearly late for an appointment. These people don’t seem to care that they stick out and seem odd as they continue to move down the street, shouting their hosannas and their praise for the world to hear. They are obnoxious with their joy and their excitement, creating a small locus of chaos around one individual.

In Luke’s version, this might have been the picture as Jesus entered Jerusalem. A large group of people are surrounding him, not holding back, but sharing and shouting their joy. They are obnoxious with their faith, hoping that the whole world hears their cries. They are running and grabbing anyone who will listen. They are shaking the shoulders of any passer-by bubbling over with excitement and joy over this Jesus. They are being obnoxious with their faith.

It reminds me of Hank Hill from the television show, *King of the Hill*. Hank loves propane, and will tell anyone he can why he loves propane, and why it is the best thing in the world. He is not afraid to share his joy and his passion for propane even if it is obnoxious.

In a similar way, the disciples, like a band of kindergarten students shouting and singing, are not afraid to share their passion and their love for Christ. This is a powerful moment, and they shall not be kept from shouting God's glory. It is a model, and example for all of us to follow, to emulate and to adopt. The disciples are not holding back in any way at all.

Movement 4 – Reacting to God's Glory

What is it that the disciples are doing? They are praising Christ for what he has done. They are lifting up Jesus' teaching, his miracles, and his power. Luke tells us, "...the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen..." This is the source of their praise and their joy. They were remembering the time when Jesus gave sight to a blind man, and they shouted their praise. They remembered the moment when Jesus fed the multitudes and they shouted their praise. They remembered the day when Jesus healed a boy who was possessed by a demon, the day when Jesus cast the Legion of demons out of the strong and wild man, the day when Jesus made a sick girl well, and they were shouting their praise. They remembered Lazarus, the miracle of life in the midst of death, and they offered praise.

They were remembering the sayings Jesus offered the teaching of Christ. They were remembering the call to love neighbors and enemies. They were remembering the call to follow God and not Rome. They were remembering the assurance that the least of the people were held most precious in the hands of God, and they were shouting praise for this truth and this glory of the Kingdom of God that Christ was heralding. It was their experience with Christ that fueled and pushed their praise.

If someone watching on the street stopped a shouting disciple, he or she would have received an earful of all that Jesus had done, and the impact that Jesus had had on their life. It was like a whole line of character witnesses were walking in and taking a stand for Jesus, offering to tell his story, share his glory and proclaim his name for all that he has done. They are reacting to Christ's deeds of wonder, to Christ's sayings and they are moved to shout, to sing, to be obnoxious with their joy in response to Christ's glory.

Have you ever heard an overdone introduction? It is one where the guest starts to list all of the degrees the speaker has, and then all of the awards the individual has achieved, and then all of the things the individual has done, and then all the people the individual has touched and changed, and then breaks into a song, with a line of dancers, fireworks, elephants all in praise of this individual. This level of excitement and intensity is what the disciples are offering with their praise and glory. They are trying to introduce Christ in the best way that they can, trying to let their actions match the glory that they have witnessed in Christ. They are praising Christ for who he is. They are praising Christ for what he has done. They are remembering and shouting for Christ's glory.

Movement 5 – Sharing the Joy

Can we also find ourselves shouting with joy for what Christ has done? Can we find ourselves joining the flock of the disciples and shouting praise and glory? Can we also find ourselves shouting for what Christ has done?

Before forcing and contriving your hosannas. Before trying to fake your praise, follow the examples of the disciples. They are praising Christ because of what he has done, let's do the same. Let's tap into the joy of Christ, let's remember how Christ has been and is a part of our lives, let's reach down and claim the foundation of our faith. Let's remember what Christ has done.

Do you remember what your life was like before you knew Jesus? Do you remember feeling lost? Do you remember wondering if there was any purpose at all to life? Maybe you were living a life that was chaotic and destructive. Maybe you were living a life that did not seem to have any hope, and then that faithful, that glorious day you finally let go and took Christ into your heart. Then, that faithful day you accepted Christ as your Lord and savior, and nothing was again the same. Now you live as someone who is loved, as someone who is precious. Now you live with a hope and knowledge that you are precious in the heart of God. Now you live life with a joy that comes from Christ. For that change, for that hope, shout your praise.

Do you remember the time when you were struggling with life? Do you remember the time when you were afflicted with illness? Do you remember the time when your family was falling apart? Do you remember that time when it felt like everything around you was crumbling and you were losing hope? Remember how Christ stayed with you, held onto you, and led you to glory. Remember resting on Christ, trusting in Christ, and relaying on Christ for assurance, for comfort and for hope in your times of troubles. Remember those times, and offer your praise for Christ.

Join with the disciples and praise Christ for the miracles, the healings, the cleansings, and the transformations that happen daily through Christ. Join with the disciples and praise Christ for teaching us and showing us this new ethic of love that we are all called to live. Join with the disciples and praise Christ for what he has done.

Remember how you can now walk with a hope of salvation, remember how you can now walk without fear, remember how you now can live into the life that God has called you to live and offer your praise for Christ.

Take that dissonant leap and praise Christ for the crucifixion and the resurrection. Take that leap and praise Christ for what he is going to do. Praise Christ for the hope that you have through the resurrection, praise Christ for the power of the cross.

Remember what Christ has done for you and then let your praise sound. Then you will be able to proclaim the glory of the Lord in an authentic way. Then you will be ready, you will be grounded to proclaim your faith to the world. Maybe it will be with the shouting and the singing of the disciples, or maybe it will be in a quiet yet profound way. Your life will reflect your praise when you remember what Christ has done for you. Your actions will reflect your faith when you remember how Jesus has changed your life, and you will be able to join the disciples in praise.

Maybe others will see you as obnoxious, maybe others will see you as different, but when you are responding to the glory of the Lord in your life, how can you help from shouting your joy. Now, Jesus' response makes sense. How can you keep from shouting out? Even the stones themselves will sing because of Christ, how can you not? With Christ as your Lord, how can you keep from singing? The woes of the world may seem overwhelming despairing, but you walk with Christ, how can you keep from singing?

My life goes on in endless song
Above earths lamentations,
I hear the real, though far-off hymn
That hails a new creation.

Through all the tumult and the strife
I hear its music ringing,
It sounds an echo in my soul.
How can I keep from singing?

While though the tempest loudly roars,
I hear the truth, it liveth.
And though the darkness round me close,
Songs in the night it giveth.

No storm can shake my inmost calm,
While to that rock I'm clinging.
Since love is lord of heaven and earth
How can I keep from singing?

When tyrants tremble in their fear
And hear their death knell ringing,
When friends rejoice both far and near
How can I keep from singing?

In prison cell and dungeon vile
Our thoughts to them are winging,
When friends by shame are undefiled
How can I keep from singing?

Remember what Christ has done for you. Remember how Christ has effected your life, and you will join in the song and the praise for what Christ has done.

Movement 6 – Sharing the Whole Story

But don't stop there. Go further and share the whole story of Jesus. Live the whole story of Jesus. Today we are praising God for the actions Christ has done in his ministry on Earth. We are praising Christ for the teachings, the healings, and the actions we have experienced. Today we are praising Christ for what he is doing in our life and I believe we are challenged to live that praise in our life. Yet the story does not end with today. The story continues from today to Christ's actions in Jerusalem, to his final meal with the disciples, to his prayer in the garden, the trial, the scourging, and the crucifixion.

Just as we remember what Christ has done and how Christ has lifted up our life, we are also called to remember the suffering that Christ is going to endure. Remember the rest of the story. Remember that final meal Christ had with his disciples. Remember the words and actions Christ offered in that meal, and how that meal brings all Christians together as a unified body. Remember the prayer Jesus offered in the garden. Remember the anguish Christ felt and the eventual submission Christ embraced. Remember how the world turned against Christ at the trial. Remember how Christ was rejected by the powers and the principalities. Remember how Christ did not respond in the common ways that one would expect but in God's way.

Remember that final walk up to Golgotha. Remember the weight of the cross that Christ carried, that Christ bore as he struggled up the hill. Remember the sight of three crosses on a hill, in the center is our Lord who cried for water, who cried for his Lord, who asked that we be

forgiven and who died. Remember this story as well and live it for all to see. Live this story of passive resistance, live the story of submission to God, live the story of unity in the church, and live the story of carrying your own cross no matter how great the struggles or the despair. Just as you tell the glory of the Lord, tell the world this part of the Lord's story.

When I was in seminary I worked for a church in Cambridge, MA. Each year that church would join the other churches in Cambridge walk the passion of Christ through the stages of the cross. Each year I helped to carry a full size cross through the streets of Cambridge. We walked together, Lutherans and Methodists, Episcopalians and Baptists, and any others stopping and telling and hearing the story of Christ. Those one the street saw individuals gathered around a cross, somberly walking and praying, and asking God for guidance. We were witnessing the whole story of Jesus on the cross. This week we are called to live and to share this story as well. Are you ready to tell, to live and to share the story of Christ? Let the story be heard in your words and in your actions for the entire world to know and believe in the Lord who lived, who suffered and died, and who will come again. Remember the story, live the story, tell the story, be obnoxious if you have to, but don't hold back in sharing the power and the glory of Christ our Lord who enters today in triumph and who ends in the glory of the Lord.

AMEN