

Every sport has their form of celebration, and while they all hold some sort of entertainment value, I have to say that there is nothing more entertaining, creative, and sometimes just downright weird than a full grown football player rocking out their own unique touchdown dance. You can say what you want about players these days and their excessive celebrations, but the reality is, it's been going on longer than just recently. I mean you can go back to the Cincinnati Bengals and the Ickey Shuffle. It wasn't the most sophisticated of dance moves, but it set a precedent and a standard.

Some players stick to one signature move so when they score you know exactly what to anticipate. Rob Gronkowski had his Gronk spike, a sharp slam of the ball into the ground so hard that people called it earthquake inducing. Cam Newton was infamous for rotating between dabbing and pretending to rip his jersey open like Clark Kent revealing his Superman costume underneath. Victor Cruz spent so much time salsaing in the end zone that he ended up getting an invitation onto Dancing with the Stars. Every Green Bay Packer dreams of their first Lambeau Leap, jumping into the arms of fans who hold them up in celebration.

Yet, for every signature move, there are those players that chose to mix it up as often and as ridiculously as they possibly could. Love him or hate him, Terrell Owens comes to mind almost immediately. Grabbing

popcorn from a fan and cascading it through his Cowboys helmet.

Whipping a Sharpie out of his sock, signing the ball, and handing it to a 49ers fan. Chad Johnson once proposed to a cheerleader after a touchdown and another time put on a jacket that said future Hall of Famer. Joe Horn of the Saints once hid a cell phone in the padding of the goal post and once he scored pulled it out and pretended to make a phone call. Now with celebrations being accepted and not flagged by the league, teams seek to make their celebrations more elaborate and humorous since they have time to plan. There have been games of duck, duck, goose, bowling the football into the offensive line and knocking them down, games of hide and seek, pretending to pose for photographs, the list is never-ending and you can fall down a pretty deep YouTube hole if you start looking them all up.

The thing is though...and like I said, I love watching these things, because they're ridiculous and amusing and now that they don't come with penalties attached they don't feel as misplaced, you're also excessively celebrating literally doing your job. I mean, if you are a wide receiver playing football, your job is to catch the ball and try your best to get it in the end zone. If you're a running back, your main objective is to cross the goal line with the ball in your hands. Even defensive touchdowns, interceptions are part of the game, part of what you're hoping to do. And sure sometimes

the way these things happen is in purely spectacular fashion, the leaping, fingertip catch, the 50 yard breakaway run, the interception impossibly nabbed out of the air. But at the same time...football without touchdowns isn't exactly a game...it would just be a lot of running and throwing. So by all means celebrate like crazy, but know that you're celebrating doing what you were expected to do...

Now...I will be the first to admit that I read this week's gospel and was like, well, bleck, nothing really there that I want to talk about, because especially at face value, the gospel is deeply uncomfortable when it is so blatant in its use of language about slavery, and there's really no way of getting around the fact that that is the metaphor Jesus is using here. Yet, we do have to take a step back and remember the context that Jesus is operating within. These are people who would have known intimately the relationship of slavery, the expectations that were placed upon slaves and the abhorrent behavior of masters. So when Jesus is trying to get across to them difficult concepts and ideas of faith, he sometimes uses comparisons that in our current context are not comfortable, and yet, even with that, it doesn't render the message at the heart of the uncomfortable words any less relevant.

So let's try to break this down a bit. I'm honestly not quite sure how Jesus talking about mustard seed like faith ties into the second part of the

gospel, so for this go round of the lectionary, we're going to set the mustard seed stuff aside and focus on the weird stuff in the second half. I think we need to remember here that Jesus is talking to the disciples in this conversation, and so let's take note of some of the conversations that have happened with the disciples in the past. There have been instances of James and John asking Jesus to sit at his right hand in heaven, basically requesting the most coveted spots in the kingdom. Jesus has overheard the disciples bickering about which one of them is the greatest. He has dealt with any number of occasions of trying to explain to them the whole last shall be first and the first shall be last thing. Essentially, for the disciples, they have a hard time getting their heads around the fact that discipleship has little to do with accolades, and everything to do with servanthood.

This is what Jesus is getting at. What he's saying is, how many of you would reward/congratulate/make a big deal out of your slave or servant doing what was expected of them? None of you. You would expect them to continue to go about living into those expectations, because at the end of the day, they have done what they were supposed to do. Jesus tells them that that is in some ways the mentality of discipleship, we have done only what we ought to have done! With no expectation of grand gestures of thanksgiving, no rewards, no accolades, no massive pat on the back. They,

much like the rich man in last week's gospel, know the prophets, they know scripture, they know what the call of God is when living in God's kingdom, and they've been hanging out with Jesus for long enough to *really* know what the expectations are. This should simply be a part of *who they are*, rather than some big production that makes them look good and garners them affection, attention, and a gold star.

This is where the gospel enters into not only using uncomfortable language but possibly *making* us uncomfortable because it calls us out a bit. We have all had our moments with this, I'm honestly not sure any of us are free from the call out here. I mean think of how many times you've seen on Facebook the post that goes something like, "I bet no one has the guts to say they love Jesus in the comments, but I do!" with the clear expectation that everyone needs to comment or obviously they don't love Jesus and obviously Jesus is 100% checking our Facebook feeds for likes. How many of us have done the thing where we know we've given to charity or made some kind of donation or just done basically anything above and beyond general kindness and we can't help ourselves from boasting about it a little bit. Or how many of us have looked at all of the ways we put our time, effort, and money into our lives here at Trinity and then compared them to other people and wanted to scoff because clearly we do more than they do,

and if that's the case well then maybe we should get a bit more of a say in how something goes compared to anyone else because it's our money keeping the lights on. How many of us have ended up rattling off all of the things we have done because we feel like we need to justify our faith and say no, no, I swear I love God because *look at all of this!!!*

It's a common impulse. I mean, my goodness, clearly the disciples did it. But behind that impulse is the desire to be rewarded, to be congratulated, for in a lot of ways, simply doing what we ought to do. Now, I am not saying that this means that when things happen or things get done that we shouldn't say thank you. Giving thanks and being thankful for the shared gifts of one another is *huge*, but we shouldn't be in it for the thanks and we certainly shouldn't do the things because we think God is going to give us a few more divine brownie points than someone else.

At the end of the day, we too know what Jesus has said, what we are called to. We are people called to be radically hospitable, arms open and loving to all of God's children no matter who they are or what they look like. We are people called to care compassionately and generously for our neighbors to the best of our ability. We are people called to share of our time and our talents in whatever ways we are able to contribute to the mission of the kingdom of God. We are people called to love one another as

Jesus loved us, without caveat or limitation or expectation. This is simply who we are called to be. This is what we ought to do. It shouldn't have to be dragged out of us begrudgingly, it shouldn't only be done if we know there's something in it for us. Shouldn't it be enough to know that one of our neighbors, one of our siblings felt joy, felt love, felt a little safer today because of us? Shouldn't it be enough to know that we put some of Jesus' words into action today? Shouldn't it be enough to live out our baptismal calling, grateful that we had the opportunity to do so?

I jokingly said to Bible study that if we're operating on celebrating doing our jobs, then I should like spike my notes after this sermon, like yeah, nailed it, when at the end of the day, it's my job to write a sermon and get up here and try my best to help all of us figure out the gospel. How many of you would do that at work? A teacher doing a touchdown dance because they got all their papers graded, a nurse giving their attending a chest bump after getting an IV line in. It's what we ought to do. It's who we are. We can probably skip the touchdown dance. The same goes for our faith. Who we are are claimed and called children of God, who feel the desire to go out into God's world to share a little bit of God's love with our siblings, to try and care for others. I mean trust me, the act is celebration worthy, but maybe, just maybe, we leave the touchdown dances on the field. **AMEN!!!**