

## **“Dancing & Mourning”**

### **Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30**

“But to what will I compare this generation?  
It is like children sitting in the marketplaces  
and calling to one another, ‘We played the flute for you,  
and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.’

For John came neither eating nor drinking,  
and they say, ‘He has a demon’;  
the Son of Man came eating and drinking,  
and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard,  
a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’  
Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.”

At that time Jesus said, “I thank you, Father,  
Lord of heaven and earth,  
because you have hidden these things  
from the wise and the intelligent  
and have revealed them to infants;  
yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.

All things have been handed over to me by my Father;  
and no one knows the Son except the Father,  
and no one knows the Father except the Son  
and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

“Come to me, all you that are weary  
and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me;  
for I am gentle and humble in heart,  
and you will find rest for your souls.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

## **Dancing & Mourning**

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

July 5, 2026

Rev. Michael P. Catanzaro

### **I.**

What we have before us today is known as the parable of the children in the marketplace. Most of us recognize the concluding verses of the passage as we hear these words often, especially at funerals: “*Come to me, all you that are weary, and I will give you rest.*” In such a context, these words are easily understood and gratefully received. Yet, they are somewhat *out of context* when read at a funeral or, perhaps it is more accurate to say, not fully in the *correct* context. So, this morning I would like to go back in time a bit and replant these words into their original soil.

### **II.**

In the first section of this passage Jesus offers a parable. A parable is a simple story which is used to illustrate a moral or spiritual principle. Jesus makes a comparison in the story of children in the marketplace playing flutes to which none will dance, and, then, alternately wailing while none join them in their mourning. Jesus then goes on to explain the parable in the verses which immediately follow.

What we may miss, as it is never explicitly articulated, is that Jesus is specifically criticizing the Scribes and the Pharisees who rejected both John the Baptist, the ascetic who neither ate or drank, but Jesus as well, the hedonist who both ate and drank with pretty much anyone. It seems that they, the religious officials of the day, along with their entire generation, simply will not be satisfied. They are, in a word, fickle. Say that a few times with me: *fickle*.

### **III.**

Fickle is one of those words we use but really do not appreciate. At least not in the full sense of its meaning. Typical usage of the word “fickle” references an unpredictable taste or preference, like a pet cat and its food choices. However, the deeper and truer meaning of the word “fickle” has to do not with a quirky culinary palate, but with frequent changing in one’s loyalty, interests, or affections. We can see this, lightly, with phrases such as a fickle

electorate which is always looking for a change, or a fickle consumer who is never satisfied with the multitude of choices to be found on the supermarket shelves. Another example is the internet. Any good web designer will tell you you have to place the stuff you want seen on the first or home page, as people seldom take the time to probe deeply into any one site. It is click, click, click; on to the next site. Say it with me: *fickle*.

#### IV.

The origin of the word “fickle,” has its roots not in words like “choosy” or “finicky,” but in the Old English word “*ficol*” meaning “deceit.” Aha! *Now* we are on to something. Whereas, in the best of light “fickle” denotes an erratic changeableness or instability, in the worst light it indicates a concealing or misrepresentation of the truth. Now, hold on to this notion because I want to take a break from this line of inquiry. We will come back to it in a bit, though, I promise.

That said, I am not really sure just how to proceed with this next part of the sermon, or the propriety of saying what I intend. More to the point, I have serious doubts about my ability to get through the saying of it. Nevertheless, here goes.

#### V.

For some reason or another I was reminded this week that my very first “Dead Show” took place 40 years ago on July 4th 1986 at the soon to be razed Rich Stadium, long-time home of the Buffalo Bills (click [here](#) to listen to the full concert). Much like the weather we just experienced this past week, I remember it being a wicked hot day. My old friend (Dr.) Tom was with me and for *some* reason or another we decided to get as close to the stage as was possible. This meant we were on the actual field hanging out with several 1000 other folks, who where just as hot and sweaty as we were, waiting for the show to begin.

The thing about a Dead Show is that, generally speaking, one is either there to be a participant *in* the show or to be a spectator *at* the show. That is, either you are there to watch all the weird and wacky people who have traditionally attended Dead Shows, or you have decided that you, yourself, *are* one of those weird and wacky people to whatever degree is comfortable for you.

## VI.

By any measure, a Dead Show was an absolutely fascinating sociological and anthropological experience. That is, until the music started. First would be the snap and thump of drum beats from Micky and Bill. Then you would more feel than hear the slow rumble of Phil's bass. Jerry would start to weave in some seemingly stray notes from his electric guitar. Bobby's rhythm guitar added texture and Brent's keyboard began to tinkle. Then, as if simultaneously pulling together the ends of all the threads, a woven tapestry of sound would get pulled tight and, all at once, over 60,000 people suddenly started to dance without any thought whatsoever about one's place in the show, or the world. It was all about shaking one's bones as the music rang out and cascaded over us all. Everyone danced, and I do mean *everyone*. It was primitive, it was tribal, it was ecstatic, and it was *definitely* spiritual.

## VII.

I don't know about you, but I don't do all that much dancing these days. While it might simply be the case that my concert-going days are long since behind me, the greater truth is that as we age we grow increasingly fickle. We find less and less in life which gives us *cause* to get up and dance. Humor, and joy, and revelry are simply harder to come by as we get older.

This, I am beginning to realize, is a serious challenge to us as people of faith. Which is why it is so important that we, as a faith community, allow and express the joy, and laughter, and merriment which comes with sharing our lives with each other. Being in the company of others helps us to shake off our fickleness and find the joy that encourages us to get up and boogie. Or, at the very least, to tap our foot in rhythm with the leaping of life and the languor of love. Whatever it takes to be a spectator *in* the show rather than just a spectator *at* the show.

## VIII.

(Now we arrive at the hard part.) While dancing together is certainly a *challenge*, mourning together is an *imperative*. This past Friday morning I arrived at St. Mary's Cemetery in Potsdam to officiate at the Committal Service for Riley Basford. Riley is the son of Mary & Elliott Rodee and Darren Basford & Melissa Marion, who died several years ago at the age of 15. I am very hesitate to share these things with you today, as I in no way wish to trade on

what happened to Riley. However, Riley's story is necessarily part of the story of this church, and Riley's is a story that his mother, Mary, has chosen to tell to a great many others (politicians in Washington, especially) as a warning about the danger social media poses to our children in the hope of preventing other kids and their families from suffering such heartbreak. *(In the narrative sermon to be emailed I have included a link [here](#) to a 6 minute video about Riley produced by the NYS Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence.)*

## **IX.**

I knew Riley's service was going to be difficult for me to officiate, but I was in no way prepared for what I saw when I pulled in and parked. There must have been 100 red, heart-shaped helium balloons waving in the wind which had been attached to graves fluttering throughout the entire expanse of the cemetery, and easily that number of people gathered for the service. I have been to countless of such services and *never* have I seen anything like that. Not even close. Brought me to tears (though that happens quite easily these days). I had to sit in my car for several minutes just to get myself together.

I decided to share this today in the sermon in order to illustrate the importance of mourning with each other. Sometimes our pain is so much that rather than face the fear we become fickle. We lock ourselves away from each other literally and figuratively, and endeavor to deceive ourselves about the truth of our grief. Such loss, though, can only be assuaged by the company of those who love us, like our families, our friends and, especially, our church.

## **X.**

Beginning in earnest with St. Augustine and stretching for almost the past two millennia, we Christians have been greatly taken up with the Doctrine of Original Sin. I believe that doctrine, so laboriously repeatedly and exhaustively expounded upon can, really, be summed up in a single word: *fickle!* We don't know what we want, but want everything. We aren't satisfied with all that we have, so we want even more. We seek the truth of our lives, but when it knocks on our door we tell it to go away. We want certain things *in* our lives but are unwilling to pay the price for them. We want other things *out* of our lives but are unwilling to part with them. We seek contentment, but are not willing to sit long enough, or still enough, to discover it is already there right beside us.

## **XI.**

We are not satisfied with, or loyal to all the goodness of the garden so we continue seeking, unsatisfied, to discover what lies behind the goodness. We never recognize that it isn't the fruit which is forbidden but, rather, the constant questing for it because we are never satisfied with what we already have. Though we hear the words of Jesus talking about comfort for our souls at the time of death, these words are *meant* for the time that is our life.

Come to me, says Jesus, be here in this place. Quench the thirst which otherwise cannot be slaked. Discover, through me, the God who has created you, who loves you, and who provides for you. Arrive at the way, revel in the truth, bask in the light. When it is time to dance, slip off your shoes and kick up your heels. When it is time to mourn, gather with others to weep and wail for all that has been lost and, in so doing, you might discover all we have been given each day, every day, in the simple blessings of this life.

## **XII.**

Be grateful that you can choose to live not by Original Sin and a fickleness that never attains joy, but by being replanted in the original soil of Eden's garden where beauty abounds, peace is plentiful, rest is received, and contentment found. Celebrate that our lives here together are filled with gentle and humble-hearted folk, especially here at the church, who have taught us how to actually *live* our lives and to do so with gratefulness and joy. That in spite of the trials and tribulations of this world, at the end of each day we might find the yoke to be easy and the burden light if we will only share them with others. Amen.