

Stubborn alleluias

By [Laura Kelly Fanucci](#)

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A few days before Lent, I sat my son down for a serious conversation over crackers.

“So buddy, Lent starts on Wednesday. Lent is a time when we get ready for Easter. And during Lent we don’t sing Alleluia. So we’re not going to sing Alleluia for a while.”

His sea-blue eyes sparkled up at mine. His milk-smeared mouth turned up at the corners, and he cocked his head full of curls to one side.

“Should we sing Alleluia?” he cooed.

“No,” I replied patiently. “I just said we’re NOT going to sing it for a while. Because it’s Lent. And we don’t sing Alleluias during Lent. We save our Alleluias for Easter.”

“Should we sing Alleluia?” “No.”

“Should we – ” “NO.”

“Sh-” “NO! I SAID NO ALLELUIAS DURING LENT!”

Snack and failed attempt at liturgical catechesis both met an untimely end. The cherub scampered out of the kitchen and raced up the stairs, warbling as he went: “AH-AH-YAY-YOO-YA, AHHHH-YAY-YOO-YA!”

The rest of Lent? You guessed it. Our house has been filled with Alleluias. Cranky Alleluias and cheerful Alleluias. New lyrics sung to Alleluia tunes. Alleluia lyrics slapped onto nursery rhyme songs.

You would think we were already stuffing our cheeks full of Easter chocolates the way Alleluias are resounding round here.

I was annoyed for a while. Ok, I foisted my Lenten disciplines on my child and it failed. I tried to teach a two-year old about the somber

tenor of a solemn season and it was a total flop. I realize now that if I had never uttered the A word on Ash Wednesday, I probably would have had a Alleluia-free Lent. I get it.

Silly, silly new mama.

But in the dusty midst of spring cleaning last weekend, a piece of paper fluttered to the floor as I swept a pile across my desk. I picked up the small scrap, its edges taped and retaped, remnants of a journey from childhood mirror to dorm room wall:

Let nothing so fill you with sorrow that you forget the joy of Christ risen.

(Dear Mother Teresa. That little lady had a gift for summing up the Gospel.*)

I thought about the stubborn persistence of joy.

Scraggly green shoots that push up through concrete cracks. Bandaged children who squeal with delight as they play in bombed-out buildings. Cancer patients who crack jokes with their nurses.

Something small and resilient within the human spirit seeks joy at any cost. Alleluia is a stubborn word to purge from our vocabulary. Our tongues ache for it during Lent: the forty days seem too long, and we're cranky and tired by the end. We need more joy. Which is precisely the point: to do without so we remember how to do with.

This year, we're plagued with an abundance of Alleluias, courtesy of one cheeky toddler. But I've given up fighting with joy. I figure God thought we could use an extra dose of delight in our days, and I'm done complaining. Aren't all our Lents supposed to be lived in the light of Easter joy?

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