

So I was at that processional.

It was many years ago, when I was just a 12-year-old, and my memories of the day are sort of fuzzy, but one thing I do remember is being confused.

It was hard to for me to see Jesus trotting along the road, riding on his donkey, so I climbed on top of the roof of a local building, so I could watch the procession.

It was a bizarre sight.

For one thing, Jesus was riding on a donkey with her nursing foal following behind her.

People don't ride donkeys; they're slow and stubborn.

I don't get why he didn't just walk.

I mean, if you're gonna ride an animal, get a horse for heaven's sake, that's what Cesar rides.

So if that wasn't weird enough, these spectators at this parade, they were odd too.

I don't get why they were so excited, because this wasn't much of a parade, it was one guy on a donkey.

That's just an odd occurrence that you might find in one of the backwater towns around here,

but I wouldn't exactly say that a man riding into Jerusalem on a donkey is just cause for having streets lined with spectators.

And yet, that's what there was, scores of people on both sides of the road, welcoming him as he approached Jerusalem.

But not only that, they covered the road as he approached.

They took the cloaks off their backs, for many of them I bet it was the only cloak they had!

Then they pulled branches from nearby palm trees and laid them in the road.

Anything that they could get their hands on to pave the road for Jesus and his donkey, they laid it down for him.

What I didn't get was that yea, this guy was impressive, I mean he healed people, he multiplied food, and made people rise from the dead.

But he was also off... if you know what I mean.

He told really confusing stories, he said they were parables, all I know is that I didn't understand them.

And he talked about how the Son of God was going to die and then be raised from the dead.

If this person was the Son of God, and he was that important, wouldn't he survive?

Wouldn't God save him?

Then people were calling him the Messiah, the one who was going to save us Jews from the Roman Occupation.

That sounded well and good, but this guy was the opposite of intimidating, and he hung out with really questionable people.

I mean, widows, lepers, tax collectors, his gaggle of fishermen who followed him around.

If he was the Messiah, then he had a weird legion of loyal followers.

And Jesus told people to sell or give away everything they had.

This guy, the one who had no home, and hardly had 2 coins to rub together, was supposed to defeat Rome, and give us our city back?!

I was skeptical, to say the least.

The story of this child's retelling of the Palm Sunday processional speaks to why this Sunday is so confusing.

Jesus' followers were frantically celebrating his arrival.

I imagine them screaming like 16 year olds at a Beatles Concert.

They loved him, practically worshipped him, agreed to follow him to the ends of the earth.

And then, just 5 days later, he's been denied, betrayed, abandoned, tried and crucified.

What in the world happened?!

How do you go from such zealous enthusiasm to betrayal?

Well, long story short, Jesus wasn't who they were hoping for.

He wasn't the one they were expecting.

He didn't do what they thought their Messiah ought to do, and so they turned on him.

They thought the Jewish messiah was going to come and rule in power and might and revenge.

They had read the book written by the prophet, Zechariah.

He prophesied, "*Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!*

*Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!*

*Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

*He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the warhorse from Jerusalem;*

*and the battle-bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth." (Zechariah 9: 9-10)*

Hear that, triumphant and victorious, cut off the chariot from Ephraim and return the command of Jerusalem to the Israelites,

he will remove the weapons and command peace to the ends of the earth.

He's the next King David, one of the most powerful kings in the history of Israel.

He will redeem us!

He will be the Divine Warrior who subdues the nations!

Come on Jesus, into Jerusalem you go, to tell Herod and Pilate who's the real king!

But that's not what happened, because that's not who he was.

He was the one who said, "*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*"

No, they wanted a mighty Messiah who would inherit the Earth.

But he is the one who said, "*You have heard it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.'*"

No, they wanted ruler who would destroy the ones who persecuted them! And to pray for them?!

What kind of intimidation is that, Jesus?

But he's the one who said, "*Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink.*"

Nope.

They wanted someone who would promise to protect their lives and secure access to all the food and water they could ever want.

And this is the guy who said, *“If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.”*

They didn’t want treasure in heaven, and they certainly didn’t want to sell the few things they could afford to have after paying the oppressive taxes to the empire.

Finally, what Jesus said that really upset them was,

*“Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant...”*

That was definitely not what they wanted their Messiah to say.

They wanted him to reassure them that he was the greatest, and that he would make sure they all had greater lives than the Romans, once all was said and done.

They wanted him to tell them that they were superior.

You see, about 200 years before this, was another procession into Jerusalem.

The revolutionary Simon Maccabaeus led a successful Jewish revolt against the Hellenistic empire.

The book of Maccabees tells of Simon’s “triumphal entry” into Jerusalem, *“the Jews entered...with praise and palm*

*branches...because a great enemy had been crushed and removed from Israel.”*

That’s what Jesus’ followers wanted, what they were hoping for, why they lined the streets for him, praised him and treated him like their king, because they expected him to act like one!

But they turned on him in a matter of days because he was not the king they were looking for.

He didn’t act like it, he didn’t look like it, he didn’t talk like it.

When they realized that he wasn’t going to save himself from death, they turned their backs on him.

They could not proclaim a Messiah that was going to get himself killed, what kind of power was that?!

Death meant defeat.

They were tired of being defeated and conquered.

So they didn’t care if he died because he was useless to them.

Now, it’s easy for us to sit here thousands of years later and condemn this people who betrayed him.

It’s easy for us to say that they were fools, they did the wrong thing, they should have stayed loyal to him, because we know how the story ends.

But truthfully, even though I know Jesus ultimately defeats death and evil,

and even though I know that his death and resurrection were the ultimate triumph,

and even though I know that we, Christ's followers, are still here and the Roman empire is long gone, even though I know all this...

I still betray Jesus.

I betray him each time I make decisions that are antithetical to his teachings.

Each time I put myself before someone else, each time I put revenge over forgiveness.

Each time I choose to judge rather than love.

Each time I write someone off for being different.

Each time I spend more money on myself than I should, each time, each time, I do these things, I betray Jesus.

We aren't an oppressed people living in an occupying regime that's trying to squeeze every penny out of us.

It's not dangerous for us to practice our faith and we aren't persecuted for it.

We experience no legal repercussions for following Jesus, it doesn't put our lives in danger.

And yet, that's what the Jews were up against.

They were desperate for a militant messiah because they needed him for their literal, physical survival.

Considering their political oppression and the dangers associated with following him, I can see why they weighed the options and decided it wasn't worth it.

Now, mind you this wasn't all of his disciples.

There was a core group who stayed faithful to him, but once he was arrested by the authorities, most people fled for the hills.

We have no excuses for not following Jesus, and yet we still have trouble doing it.

As we begin this holiest of weeks and prepare for Jesus' Last Supper, his execution and resurrection, we have to ask ourselves, are we done betraying him?

Are we ready to follow him all the way to the cross, to the tomb, and to the resurrection, everyday for the rest of our lives?

We have all the evidence, we know it's the right, it's the only thing to do.

Now let's live as faithfully as we profess to be. Amen.