

## WHO IS THIS?

Did Jesus wear many hats? Did he play different roles?  
He seems to be a very multifaceted person.

His life and ministry are complicated.  
Jesus did many impressive things to prove that he was God's chosen one -- that God was in him in a very special way.

He modelled how to live and how to resist yielding to temptation.  
Jesus was a strong advocate for the weak and marginalized.  
He was accepting and compassionate as the woman of the well discovered.  
He restored the wounded and the broken, such as the blind man.  
He comforted those who were grieving as witnessed by his response to Lazarus' death.  
He taught and inspired many people, including Nicodemus.

People who encountered Jesus responded to him in different ways.

In today's Matthew's text about Jesus entering Jerusalem, he is designated as a king, as the son of David and as a prophet.  
Others called him teacher or rabbi, and many hoped his was the much anticipated "conquering Messiah" who would defeat the Romans and solve all problems.  
And, a few realized **he was the Messiah of a different sort**--an inspiring, confronting and loving "son of God."

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The crowd that gathered and cheered as Jesus entered Jerusalem had mixed views of Jesus, yet based on their enthusiasm and subsequent disappearance, most were betting on him to go after those in power. No doubt, some were there just because they loved a parade.

It is human nature to prod and cheer on someone else to do the fighting and then hide when the arrows start flying.

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So many perceptions about Jesus, and so many different accounts about Jesus, it is hard to discern "Who he was".

The mostly oblivious citizens of Jerusalem, asked that very question when they heard the commotion from the parade.

They asked, "Who is this?"

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Moreover, the confusion tends to cloud our understanding of "WHY" Jesus decided to enter / to encounter THE city--the place of regional power and authority.

Gospel writers record that Jesus predicted the outcome of his presence in Jerusalem. Jesus foretold that he would be persecuted and killed when he went to Jerusalem.

There is modern speculation that Jesus' ministry was done; that he succeeded in establishing his purity and purpose, and it was merely time to bring things to a close. Suggesting that Jesus was the sacrificial lamb willfully taking himself to the altar to end his life, is to say that he was on a suicide mission. And, it woefully overlooks Jesus' self identity and many passages that state otherwise.

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Jesus was keenly aware of the great risk in going to Jerusalem, and in John 11, it reveals that he was keeping a low profile; he was avoiding the authorities because they were out to get him.

His disciples didn't think Jesus would go to Jerusalem for Passover. Yet, that was the best time....because all the elite and powerful would be gathered there, too.

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Luke and the many provocative encounters / episodes once in Jerusalem reveal Jesus true purpose for being there.

In Luke's gospel, before entering Jerusalem, Jesus made some strong accusations against the rulers and their control.

Moreover, according to Matthew, the first thing Jesus does, once in the city, is to attack the exploitative "free market" system. Think of clearing the temple as emptying Bay Street or Wall Street.

Jesus went to Jerusalem to confront those in power. It was a blatant mission to take on the "system". It was political in nature.

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I dare say, Jesus could have lived many more years if he would have stayed in remote areas helping the poor and needy.

Political leaders don't mind when the compassionate and the social activists are busy directly helping the marginalized and poor. It keeps them busy and uses up their resources. Public demonstrations are not a threat either, and usually are counterproductive. However, when peace and justice people gain public sympathy and/or respect, then they become powerful,..... and that is very threatening to the ruling elite.

Historians assert that the civil rights marches of the early 60s had little effect, and may have caused more fear than insight. But, when the TV news displayed picture of innocent, peaceful people being brutally assaulted by the police and their dogs, then the tide turned.

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Jesus was working his way to Jerusalem, building respect and authority as he progressed to his goal.

He **did** care for the weak and hurting. Jesus **did** heal people, yet there comes a time when treating the symptoms--when doing one on one ministry, when helping individuals is NOT enough.

Lovers of life, grace, peace and justice must always be compassionate to the victims and the weak, **and** they must confront the unjust system that is making people poor, vulnerable and weak.

Pope Francis is correct in what he recently said,  
"As long as the problems of the poor are not radically resolved by rejecting the absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation, and by attacking the structural causes of inequality, then NO solution will be found for the world's problems or ...for that matter, to any problems.

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Jesus' life and ministry included exposing and confronting unjust authority.  
Among many other things, Jesus was a political activist.

Jesus was in Jerusalem to shake the system.

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And, to be sure, there are great risks in taking on the powerful rulers.

It is risky to expose injustices, especially in the political domain.

If I were to say that the new Election Reform bill that is about to be law is unjust and a terrible abuse of power by the ruling government, you could claim that I'm venturing into politics, and you'd be right. So, maybe I better not mention it because it's too risky.

Yet, who will stand up for the disenfranchised and weak?  
How many churches spoke out against the residential schools a generation ago? Who is willing to march into Jerusalem?

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Where was the cheering crowd when Jesus dismantled the market in the Temple?

Some may have thought, "Oh my, he's going to get in trouble, and I sure don't want to be connected with that."

Others could have reacted, "Wait a minute, I work there part time" or "That vendor is a good customer of mine, and if he's out of work, I'll suffer, too."

Today, that message sounds like this: "mess with the system and the economy will collapse and you'll be hurt." That is misleading. The economy would just be different.

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Without a doubt, some of Jesus' best stories and lessons are from his time in Jerusalem, yet it was a lonely time.

More and more people were drifting away.

It is very risky to confront the established system, and the consequences can be severe.

Yet,.....this is what Jesus did. This is a part of who Jesus was.

Are we allowed to pick and chose what aspects of Jesus we follow?

Can we only follow the healing and nurturing Jesus, and ignore the radical political Jesus?

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This, the Sunday before Easter, opens as Palm Sunday. It is festive and optimistic.

However, there are two Gospel passages for today.

The first is about the upbeat entry into Jerusalem.

The other is not so cheerful, and it reflects the other side of today--Passion Sunday.

Before we give serious contemplation to being a true follower of Christ, instead of simply being a cheer leader, let hear the rest of the story. Let's hear what happens to Jesus when he confronts those in power.

[Read excerpts from Matthew 26:14-27:66 ]

{End as the crucifixion narrative begins}

It gets ugly after this point.

The heyday of Christianity is past.

The parade is over, people are looking at the church and asking,  
"Who is this?"

Agnostics, former believers and non-believers are asking us the church:

Are you what you claim to be?

Are you willing to risk everything for what you claim as truth?

Young people are saying:

Don't entertain us, show us Jesus..... the real Jesus?

Who are we?

Just fragments, bits and pieces of Jesus--are we only the feel good Jesus?

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Each of us can't be all things, yet the church has to be.

The church must be as Christ.....all the way, without reservations.