

In 2010 Pittsburgh native and sportswriter, John Moody, released a book about the 1960 Pittsburgh Pirates with the title, *Kiss It Good-Bye*. Towards the end of the book Moody writes, “The Pirates learned that they had clinched the National League Pennant at 4:43 PM Eastern Time on Sunday September 25. Less than six hours later the Pirates’ charter plane, a United Airlines four engine propeller craft, touched down at Greater Pittsburgh Airport in Moon Township, 16 Miles from the Golden Triangle. This was late on a Sunday night, before the new work week began, when men would have to return to their offices, their plants, their trucks, their real lives. Pittsburghers were having none of it! By the time the aircraft finished taxiing, the players inside were aware that their day was a long way from being done. Although radio and television newscasts told Pittsburghers who wanted to celebrate, to gather in the downtown area, some 4,500 were at the airport to be among the first to get a glimpse of the National League’s conquering champs. A bus awaited the players who climbed off the United airplane. Forty convertible limousines were requisitioned to carry them downtown in style. Vern Law flashed a “V” with his right hand from the open-top car in which he and his wife VaNita rode. It was unlike anything that had happened before, a celebration more spontaneous and joy filled than VE Day or VJ day in 1945” (pp. 228-230).

That last line sounds like something Matthew might have written about the day Jesus entered Jerusalem: “It was unlike anything that had happened before, a celebration more spontaneous and joy filled than...any other day in the history of the world.” What Matthew actually wrote in his gospel is this: *The crowds that went ahead of them and those that followed shouted, “Hosanna to the son of David!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Hosanna in the highest heaven!” When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”* (21:9-10). The crowd went wild as he got nearer. This was the moment they’d been waiting for. **All the old songs came flooding back, and they were singing, chanting, cheering, and laughing. At last, their dreams were coming true.**

“But in the middle of it all,” says NT Wright, “their leader wasn’t singing” (*Simply Jesus*, p. 1). In fact, Luke’s gospel says, “*As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city he wept over it*” (19:41). Perhaps he was weeping for the dream that had to die; weeping for the sword that would pierce the hearts of his followers. Or maybe he was weeping for the Kingdom *that wasn’t coming* as well as for *the Kingdom that was*? **I suppose their dreams were coming true, but not in the way they had imagined. He was not the king they expected.**

NT Wright goes on to say, “Jesus’ arrival in Jerusalem a few days before his death is one of the best-known scenes in the gospels. But what was it all about? **What did Jesus think he was doing?**” (*Simply Jesus*, p. 1).

I can remember when *that question* first entered my mind and heart. It was Palm Sunday 1972. I was invited to give a talk, a sermon I guess, at the youth-led Easter Sunrise Service at Zion’s Reformed Church—where a few months earlier I met a cute girl named Jayne. *I had known about Jesus all my life*. My mother was my very first Sunday School teacher. My parents brought me to church when I was 3 months old to be baptized. Not long after that, my parents taught me to pray every night before going to sleep. My family never missed a Sunday morning service at Oak Grove Presbyterian Church. In some ways I could say that I not only *knew about Jesus*, but *I knew Jesus* all my life.

In Matthew chapter 16 at a place called Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asks his disciples a key question: “*Who do people say the Son of Man is?*” (v. 13). That is, what’s the word on the street? Their answer wasn’t exactly crystal clear. They said something like, “Uh, maybe John the Baptist, or Elijah, or Jeremiah, or another prophet...” Then he asked, “*But what about you?*” “***Who do you say I am?***” Simon Peter answered, “*You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God*” (v. 16). **I knew that story, even as a 16-year-old, but I wanted to turn the question around and ask Jesus, “*Who do YOU say that YOU are?*”**

With Jesus, it’s easy to be complicated and hard to be simple. Part of the difficulty comes from the fact that Jesus was and is much, much more than we imagine. That’s not only true of people in general. It’s true of people in the

church. Ever wonder how artificial intelligence answers questions about Jesus? Googling is easy. But I've been thinking about how I mainly use my laptop for only 4 or 5 things. I use it to write sermons, to plan worship services, keep in touch with people online, store photos, and do an occasional internet search. However, my computer is capable of doing a number of other complex tasks. If my computer was a person, it may feel frustrated and undervalued because its full potential is not being realized. Like my computer, **the four gospels in my Bible that answer questions about who Jesus was, what Jesus did, and why it matters**, should be frustrated because their full potential remains unrealized.

Worse yet, Jesus himself has every right to feel frustrated and undervalued in my life. We Christians often hide behind other trivial questions about Jesus' historicity, or his diet, or his shroud. We have reduced the Kingdom of God to a private individualized faith, turning the victory of the Cross into an idea that soothes our guilty conscience. We've changed Easter into an escapist story with a happy ending that ignores the parts that are sad.

Of course, the people who shouted, "*Hosanna to the son of David!*" and then asked, "*Who is this?*" as Jesus entered the city weren't any better than we are. **The reason Jesus wasn't the sort of king people in his own day wanted is because HE WAS THE TRUE KING, not an ordinary shabby second-rate kind of king.** They were looking for a **builder**, but he was **the Architect**. They were looking for a **singer**, but he was **the Composer**. **He was the King all right, but he came to redefine kingship with his own mission, through his own work, as a result of his own fate** (*Simply Jesus*, p. 5).

I firmly believe it's time to recognize not only **who Jesus was** in his own time, but also **who he is and will be** for our own time. John, one of his closest early followers, said this about his coming: "*He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him*" (John 1:10-11). Do you see my point? Doesn't Jesus have every right to feel undervalued? **Sometimes I like to play "Guess who!" with children of a certain age.** I sneak up behind

them, cover their eyes and say, “**Guess who!**” And they always know because they saw me enter the room or saw me play the same game before. They’ll watch me play the game with their friends, and immediately say, “Do me! Do me!” Well, they already know who I am! They just watched me play the game with someone else. But they want to play the game anyway. When I cover their eyes, they giggle because they know the answer even before I ask the question. “**Guess who!**” They scream, “It’s Pap Pap” or “It’s Pastor Karl!”

Little children love to play games that are obvious, but when they get older simple games are just too obvious for them. In today’s Scripture about the Triumphal Entry, Jesus seems to be playing the game, “*Guess who I am.*”

Matthew’s gospel states the question on everyone’s mind that first Palm Sunday: *When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”* (v. 10). But the cheers turned to jeers in a very short time. Why is that? Because the crowds wanted a **miracle Jesus**. The Pharisees wanted a **ritual Jesus**. The zealots wanted a **military Jesus**. The disciples wanted a **victorious Jesus**. All these different groups that were part of the crowd had their own private view of Jesus. When they waved palm branches and shouted “*Hosanna,*” they thought they were finally **getting what they wanted**.

On the surface, it seems that the Triumphal Entry was like the Pirates winning the National League pennant—a grand and glorious celebration. But underneath are the seeds of the crucifixion lying among the palms. **This was a parade, a protest, AND a funeral procession all in one!** We easily see it as a **parade** with throngs shouting praises. If we look closely we can perhaps understand this event as a **protest**. But most importantly, Palm Sunday was a **funeral procession**. Only Jesus knew this day was the beginning of the end.

On Sunday they shouted, “*Hosanna,*” and hailed him as “*Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth,*” **but on Friday** they hung him on a cross and put up a sign saying, “*Jesus, the King of the Jews.*” **Truthfully Palm Sunday was a funeral procession.** The cheering would stop soon enough, because Jesus was “**A Very Odd Sort of King.**” Today. Let us worship the King of the ages! Amen.