

The political theater of Jesus

By [David Henson](#)

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It was the zombies. Always the zombies.

Monday, the protesters of the Occupy Wall Street movement channeled Michael Jackson in “Thriller,” dressing up like zombies, complete with fake blood, stupefied stagger and an insatiable appetite for money.

It was blatant political theater of the absurd.

And it immediately reminded me of Jesus, who was a veritable pioneer in subversive, mocking protest of the Powers that Be.

Some of my fellow Christians have attempted to root these protests in the biblical texts by connecting them to social justice, and there is a good argument for that. But in truth the most direct connection in the gospels to the demonstrations on Wall Street and around the country is in Jesus’ Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem.

Much like the demonstrators, Jesus’ intent was to make a public mockery of the government, and no one in his audience could have mistaken it as they laid palm fronds on the ground to celebrate his path. His entrance into Jerusalem was a slap in the face to Caesar and his Roman client rulers in the area. He entered in a triumphant procession, like a victorious general, but instead of a noble war steed, he clippity-clopped on a lowly ass. Instead of entering down the central path, he came through the back door.

It was blatant political theater of the absurd.

And then Jesus swiftly moved to more forceful, violently angry civil disobedience. He cleared the Temple. But that is an understatement. He strode through the Temple, shouted his condemnation of the robbers who

extorted money from worshipers and the temple tax system that keep the poor indigent and the rich luxuriously wealthy. Then he wrecked the merchants' tables, flipping them upside down and driving out the exploitative merchants with a whip.

Now, I have been [critical](#), constructively I hope, of the Occupy Wall Street movement (It is possible to be critical *and* supportive at the same time). And I think these [criticisms are valid](#),

given our media saturated times, if the movement wants to succeed. I could argue about the a variety of ethical or pragmatic issues I have with the movement. But on a pure ideological basis, this movement might echo the very actions of Jesus, as recorded in the Bible, more than anything I've seen in this country in a long, long time.

But this kind of political theater that subverts so directly the powers that be came with a price for Jesus. Those people who had jubilantly joined Jesus on his mocking, tongue-in-cheek triumphal entry into Jerusalem abandoned him, baffled perhaps by his actions in the Temple. His own disciples, when push come to shove, misunderstood his last most important lessons to resist retaliation, and his bedrock disciple even went so far as to lop of the ear of a Roman servant. And then they betrayed and abandoned him.

And then Rome killed him.

All because they didn't get what Jesus was trying to say to the world.

So if anyone wonders why I often hope that the Occupy Wall Street movement hones its message and communicates it clearly, look no further than Good Friday. If anyone wonders why I hope that Occupy Wall Street makes sure they avoid arrests, communicate clearly and band together with others, it is because it is a singular truth that calling out the rich and the powerful often ends in a crucifixion.

And they don't need any additional ammunition to justify their actions.

Originally [posted](#) at Henson's blog.