

Which parade to follow?

By [Rachael Keefe](#)

March 16, 2016

When Jesus first walked into my life, I didn't notice. There was no parade, no palms, no shouts of hosanna. I just started going to Sunday school.

A couple of years later, I felt my first call to ministry but I didn't recognize that for what it was either. I had read a book of missionary stories and was enthralled to the point of telling my mother that I wanted to be a missionary. I was nine and she was not thrilled. A few years later, I started to think about being a minister when I grew up and I still didn't really notice Jesus' presence.

Then came the years of depression and struggle. Years filled with sadness, self-loathing, and self-destruction. I was certain that God was not present in my life and doubted that God ever had been. The uncertainty remained through college and, yes, into seminary. There were times when I felt close to God and times when I felt an almost insurmountable distance. Yet, I kept choosing to follow Jesus. I had no family support and not a lot of friends who understood my call to ministry. Even though I recognized my call and the choice to pursue it, there still wasn't much by way of celebration on my part.

Truth be told, I made a lot of wrong choices along the way. There were times when I was content to blend into the crowd that celebrated Rome, promised security, and drew me in with its image of normalcy. These choices to blend in or do what was expected never led to good things. Mostly, they stirred up feelings of inadequacy and sometimes triggered bouts of depression. I experienced these as times of God's absence. In hindsight, I see these times as a result of my choosing the far more popular parade. I desperately wanted to be normal more than I wanted to be myself.

In more recent years, I've tried to pay more attention to those times of decision making. Which parade do I want to follow? Do I want to make the easy, expected choice and follow Pilate as he rides in on his big white horse, with his show of power, promises of protection, and the continuation of normative oppressive systems that seem to cost nothing? Or do I want to make the harder, less acceptable choice of

following Jesus as he rides in on his donkey, toes dragging in the sand, with his humility, safety, and freedom that come with obvious risks?

This year on Palm Sunday I feel the pressure of this kind of choice. It bears down from the political arena for sure. Then there are the everyday decisions of how to pastor this particular congregation, how to be fully present in my relationships, how to live into the person God created me to be. I have a long history of only seeing these choices when I look back. When that happens, I miss the opportunity to celebrate Jesus, to sing praises, and welcome him with extravagance as he leads me somewhere I would not go on my own. Sometimes it means that I make the decidedly wrong choice and it takes a while to recognize that Jesus is down another road waiting for me to notice.

What choices do you face this season? Where are you drawn to blend into the crowd when Jesus would rather you make the riskier decision to follow a path that would lead you to healing or embracing your authentic self more fully? I want to be more aware of these choices and my tendency to be drawn into the more popular crowd. Maybe you do, too. Palm Sunday isn't just a once a year choice. Raise the palm branches, shout, "Hosanna!" and embrace the fullness of life Jesus invites us into.

*Originally posted at [Write Out of Left Field](#)*