

Today marks another Palm Sunday, when we remember Jesus' so-called [Triumphal Entry](#) into Jerusalem. I think the title of the passage – which were added over time – is at once brilliant and misleading all at the same time. It's misleading because it reeks of an Imperialism that ruled the Church since the 4th Century that now fits into our Neo Imperialistic vision born from our being influenced by our Superpower U.S. culture. Jesus as King coming into Jerusalem with fanfare feels right to us on some level. We have fashioned our idea of what we call the Second Coming similarly, where Jesus returns to rule and judge the whole earth and everyone in it. When our vision of Jesus is that of an omnipotent King, it makes sense. But I maintain that on the surface of it, this vision is misleading, and thus, a poor title for this story.

Yet the title may also be brilliant. Jesus was apparently aware of the desire to welcome him into Jerusalem with pageantry that sought to publicly declare him to be, at the very least, king-like. People lined the streets and shouted their approval, laying down their garments like the Oscars lay down a red carpet for Hollywood royalty. They waived palm branches as they cheered – makeshift, natural rally signs of support. The whole thing may have gone unnoticed by most of the people attending Passover festivities, but Jesus' supporters – and his biggest critics – were certainly paying attention.

Jesus recognized the opportunity to make his own statement with the parade I'm not sure he even wanted (I doubt he did). The people of Israel were longing for a strongman – a John Wayne tough guy who was going to ride into Jerusalem on his trusty steed and take care of business, draining the swamp. The dream was that he would kick Rome right out of their Capitol and reestablish Israel as the center of the universe. Judaism would get cleaned up, too. This was a kind of nationalistic dream before such words existed. Instead of coming in on a stallion, however, Jesus chose a never-ridden donkey. Instead of a beefed-up Ford 150 tricked out to ooze testosterone wherever it went, he chose a budget-friendly, four-cylinder sedan that *might* be able to climb its way to Tahoe if there was a strong tailwind. In other words, a wimpy, humble ride.

Jesus had no interest in the popular role many wanted him to play. Instead, his entrance into Jerusalem was aligned with how he lived his life: humble, unassuming, accessible, approachable, kind, maybe even a little silly. That's why it was brilliant. He turned the vision on its head, trading Imperialism's crown for egalitarianism's block party.

As the week wore on, Jesus remained the same man, embodying shalom and extending a broad welcome and big God for all who had ears to hear. The inclusion was too wide and too much for many who preferred a narrower view that excluded people who made them feel uncomfortable. By Friday of that same week, Jesus found himself literally and figuratively beat up, standing before an angry crowd of haters who demanded his execution. He was to be lynched, hung on a tree of sorts for all to see – a warning for all who dared to dream like Jesus.

Palm Sunday was the beginning of the end of Jesus' life, brought to a harsh conclusion because he was too gracious, too loving, and too inclusive, which was all too dangerous for the status quo. Palm Sunday calls into question our own vision of who Jesus was and who God is, asking us whose vision guides our lives? One vision makes us feel powerful over our perceived enemies. The other makes us uncomfortable

by calling us to see everyone through eyes of love. One is more popular than the other (and always will be, I think). One will get you lauded; the other might get you killed. One of those looks like Jesus.

The global Church has always represented pioneers of change as well as those who stand firmly against it (and everything in-between). Gender equality is championed by a relatively small percentage of the Church while most churches treat women as second class. Even though Black, indigenous, and all people of color (BIPOC) are heralded as brothers and sisters by many churches, congregations and pastors remain silent in the face of inequality and inequity. The tragic irony is that the Church claims to be Christian – literally “little Christs” – even as most churches struggle to follow in Jesus’ footsteps of radical inclusivity. Instead, the general public views Christianity as the opposite, standing in the way of love and acceptance of all.

Ten years ago, Pastor Pete offered a teaching titled [*Jesus and Homosexuality*](#) in which he made the case that God does not view homosexuality (or its expression) as inherently sinful. Further, since same gender covenant is essentially built on mutual love, “gay marriage” is not sinful and is therefore blessed by God. The most divisive issue facing the Church today is related to LGBTQ+ inclusion. Tragically, most churches reject LGBTQ+ persons no matter how welcoming they appear, and with severe consequences.

Today, LGBTQ+ youth are more than 4X as likely to attempt suicide because of how they are mistreated. Recently, efforts have been made – and in some cases realized – to limit or eliminate protections for LGBTQ+ citizens in the US. The Church has in many cases fueled these efforts instead of standing with our LGBTQ+ neighbors as *IMAGO DEI* – fellow human beings made in the image of God. (Note: DEI is GOD).

Key points to consider:

- The Bible contains 31,102 verses. Just seven refer to homosexuality directly, and they refer to rape and exploitation, not consensual, loving sexual expression between freely choosing adults.
- Jesus taught and modeled radical inclusivity, inviting people into fellowship who were not welcomed based on who they were: religion, ethnicity, culture, gender, health, labels, abuse, etc.
- Jesus’ earliest followers took the inclusion even further, modeling the way for future followers.
- The Rabbinical tradition that formed Jesus and the Apostle Paul invited multiple perspectives and welcomed information from external sources to keep biblical interpretation current and relevant.
- Jesus and Paul **did not** consider the Bible to be inerrant, infallible, or so inspired by God as to erase its human authors’ influence and worldview.
- Current interpretation must include cultural, linguistic, and historical exegesis, theological reflection, current understanding from science and other disciplines, lived experience, and intentional openness to the influence of God.

How have you been taught to consider biblical texts? Does it reflect Jesus' approach?

The Biology of Sexuality

Rebecca Helm, Biologist and Assistant Professor at the University of North Carolina, Asheville.

Friendly neighborhood biologist here. I see a lot of people are talking about biological sexes and gender right now. Lots of folks make biological sex seem really simple. Well, since it's so simple, let's find the biological roots, shall we? Let's talk about sex...

If you know a bit about biology you will probably say that biological sex is caused by chromosomes, XX and you're female, XY and you're male. This is "chromosomal sex" but is it "biological sex"? Well...

Turns out there is only ONE GENE on the Y chromosome that really matters to sex. It's called the SRY gene. During human embryonic development the SRY protein turns on male-associated genes. Having an SRY gene makes you "genetically male". But is this "biological sex"?

Sometimes that SRY gene pops off the Y chromosome and over to an X chromosome. Surprise! So now you've got an X with an SRY and a Y without an SRY. What does this mean?

A Y with no SRY means physically you're female, chromosomally you're male (XY) and genetically you're female (no SRY). An X with an SRY means you're physically male, chromosomally female (XX) and genetically male (SRY). But biological sex is simple! There must be another answer...

Sex-related genes ultimately turn on hormones in specific areas on the body, and reception of those hormones by cells throughout the body. Is this the root of "biological sex"?

"Hormonal male" means you produce 'normal' levels of male-associated hormones. Except some percentage of females will have higher levels of 'male' hormones than some percentage of males. Ditto 'female' hormones. And...

...if you're developing, your body may not produce enough hormones for your genetic sex. Leading you to be genetically male or female, chromosomally male or female, hormonally non-binary, and physically non-binary. Well, except cells have something to say about this...

Maybe cells are the answer to "biological sex"?? Right?? Cells have receptors that "hear" the signal from sex hormones. But sometimes those receptors don't work. Like a mobile phone that's on "do not disturb". Call the cell, they will not answer.

What does this all mean?

It means you may be genetically male or female, chromosomally male or female, hormonally male/female/non-binary, with cells that may or may not hear the male/female/non-binary call, and all this leading to a body that can be male/non-binary/female.

Try out some combinations for yourself. Notice how confusing it gets? Can you point to what the absolute cause of biological sex is? Is it fair to judge people by it?

Of course you could try appealing to the numbers. “Most people are either male or female” you say. Except that as a biologist professor I will tell you...

The reason I don’t have my students look at their own chromosome in class is because people could learn that their chromosomal sex doesn’t match their physical sex and learning that in the middle of a 10-point assignment is JUST NOT THE TIME.

Biological sex is complicated. Before you discriminate against someone on the basis of “biological sex” & identity, ask yourself: have you seen YOUR chromosomes? Do you know the genes of the people you love? The hormones of the people you work with? The state of their cells?

Since the answer will obviously be no, please be kind, respect people’s right to tell you who they are, and remember that you don’t have all the answers. Again: biology is complicated. Kindness and respect don’t have to be.

Note: Biological classifications exist. XX, XY, XXY, XYY and all manner of variation which is why sex isn’t classified as binary. You can’t have a binary classification system with more than two configurations even if two of those configurations are more common than others.

Biology is a complicated. Be kind to people.

To watch the full, unedited Robert Simmons interview, [click here](#).

To listen to the full, unedited Robert Simmons interview, [click here](#).

To download the resource, **Spectrum of Sex and Gender**, [click here](#).

To download the resource, **LGBTQ+ Terminology Recommendations**, [click here](#).