

2026 Palm Sunday: In the Making

When do you turn into the Incredible Hulk?

Poor Dr. Bruce Banner. Don't make him angry. You won't like him when he's angry. Due to some very realistic and scientifically accurate reasons, when Bruce Banner gets mad enough, he transforms into the Incredible Hulk. Muscles bulging beneath his completely explainable green skin, he loses his mild-mannered self and becomes a raging human wrecking ball. If you follow him on Facebook and Instagram, you know he's gotten some help over the years. He's doing much better, breaking a lot less stuff.

We all struggle with the same problem that Bruce faces. We are influenced by certain circumstances and find that we are not quite feeling like our True Selves, accompanied by behaviors we may later regret. Maybe you don't relate to Bruce Banner's alter ego. Perhaps you resonate with other characters like Simon Cowell, Ron Burgundy, and Caspar Milquetoast, among others. There are times when we somehow lose ourselves. It's like being reactive instead of responsive, but different, deeper.

I am not my full self when I am around my family of origin. I have improved over time, but the dynamics of my family system – the culture of my family – is extremely powerful. I am the youngest of four kids. My siblings are 11, 9 and 5 years older than me. Naturally, they ran the show and I played my part, which was mostly minor. My wife didn't know what happened the first time she was with the whole family. I turned into the Magnificent Mute! "Where did Pete go?" she wondered. I am being a bit hyperbolic, but the reality remains: while things have changed and improved on this front over time, I am still aware of the dynamics that woo me into a not-quite-me.

[Palm Sunday](#) kicks off what Christianity refers to as Holy Week – the last week of Jesus' life and ministry, which was quite dense. A "No Kings" type event. Disruptive behavior that got everyone into Disneyland for free for a second. A short-staffed, intimate dinner with his closest followers. An excruciating, prayerful wait for the results of a procedure of sorts. An unwarranted arrest. An illegal prosecution. A wrongful execution by sundown Friday. A full week later brought Easter Sunday, of course, which for many Christians wipes away all that Holy Week offers us. At every turn, Jesus undoubtedly felt the pull of the circumstances around him.

Did his head swell during the "Welcome to Jerusalem" rally/parade? Did that cause him to be a little reckless with his words and behavior knowing he was with his people? Not quite living out of his True Self?

Was he tempted toward even greater showmanship with the street theater than was the flipping tables incident outside the Temple in Jerusalem? Surely there were some who wanted to push it a bit further, egging him on. Sort of a mob mentality influence.

During the dinner, was there any part of him that wanted to chastise his followers for not cleaning to toilet? Okay, it was feet but similarly disgusting. How did he keep from scolding them?

Waiting in the olive grove, not sure how things were going to unfold, not sure what was next – how did his fear and anxiety sway him?

Falsely accused, sentenced, tortured, and hanged on a tree-cross for all to see. How did that influence him? Was he tempted to fight back, lash out, or call in some angelic air support?

We pastor-types usually refrain from talking about Easter too soon, as if what's to come is somehow unknown, but on that morning, how was he tempted to present himself?

So many pressures. So many charged environments. So many temptations.

As I think about Jesus walking and living through it all, I see a man who is doing more than monitoring his reactionary tendencies and option for measured response (which is good practice). I see a Shalom Master – not someone who puts on the mask of love and peace, but one who embodies it as fully as anyone can. He was Shalom incarnate. He was Love embodied. He was Peace with hands and feet.

Sometimes we hold Jesus up so high that he becomes truly superhuman, like a Marvel character. Immortal. Undefeatable. Impenetrable. Unrelatable. I don't see it that way anymore (I used to).

I don't think Jesus was born with this level of groundedness. I think he developed it over time, learning through the hardships and the joys and the mundane. It takes a long time to become who we really are, to live from a different center than that which is found in our present circumstances. It takes work, thought, and time. Growing into that original skin, being our Truest Selves does not make us immune to more hardship in life, either – although it does limit self-injury. Rather, the maturity Jesus developed over time allowed him to be Truly Himself, living in Shalom, in Spirit, in Love even as he faced his last week, filled with some thrills, some heartache, excruciating death, and exhilaration.

Jesus modeled the Way for us to do the same – a Way that leads to experiencing the abundance of life, the fullness of life. It isn't easy. It takes time. Introspection. Brutal honesty. Trust in Grace. Experience in the real world. Failures. Do-overs. Disappointment. Forgiveness.

But because he did that, we can do that. He showed us the Way. The Spirit that invited him still calls, "Come, follow me!" Leave behind those old ways. Let go of the Incredible Hulk, Simon Cowell, Ron Burgundy, and Caspar Milquetoast for Deep Life. Life in the Present. Life swimming in Love and Grace and Shalom. The invitation to our unfolding becoming is forever extended to us. Come.