

Fickle

Rainy, windy, cloudy, and cold one day; sunny, calm, clear, and warm the next. The weather has been a little unpredictable this spring. But of course anywhere you go the temperature and the precipitation and the humidity are always going to fluctuate from day to day. Weather is fickle: it changes, it wavers, it's never constant. But the weather is not the only thing that is fickle. Your vehicle could be operating smoothly one day, but when you start it up the next morning the "check engine" light could be on, or the oil pressure might be low, or maybe it doesn't even at all. Vehicles can be fickle, can't they? With all of the different moving parts and all of the complicated electronic components, a lot of things can go wrong. No matter how reliable any given car or truck has been in the past, you never know what might happen the next time you're on the road.

But the most fickle thing of all is a human being. You've seen it first hand: the mood of a two year old can be happy and content one second, and then suddenly crabby and cantankerous and melting down the next. The attitude of a teenager can be passive and uninterested one moment, but belligerent and angry at the world the next. The emotions of an adult who is supposed to be experienced and mature can be pleasant and agreeable at certain times, but volatile and obnoxious the next. Human beings are fickle: they change, they waver, they are never constant.

We see that today in the story about Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. The crowds of people: from children to adults, from his chosen disciples to the hundreds of followers gathered around him, were in a very positive mood that day. They were happy, they were singing, they were worshiping their Lord. But it wasn't going to last long.

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.' " They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, some people standing there asked, "What are you doing, untying that colt?" They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!"

The people were so nice to Jesus that day! So accommodating! So overjoyed to see him! But we know the rest of the story. Just five days later, the same people who were waving palm branches in the air were waving their fists at him and the same people who were laying down their robes in the road stripped Jesus' robe off his body and the same people who were singing his praises were screaming for his death. And not just a regular death either, but a murder, an execution, a brutal, gruesome, public torture that would be so horrendous that children's eyes would be shielded from it and women would cry when they saw it and men would hold their breath in disgust as they walked by. These same people who were cheering Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem on Sunday as he rode in at the back of a donkey, would mock him as he walked back out of those city gates with a cross on his shoulders. These crowds were so fickle, so easily swayed, that in less than a week their love turned to hate.

Unreliable

Even Jesus' own disciples were fickle. Sure they still believed in him as their Savior, but these men who had retrieved the donkey for him and put their coats on its back and followed Jesus into the city, were the same men who ran away from Jesus on Thursday night to save their own skins, the same men who abandoned Jesus when he was arrested, the same men who betrayed him and denied him and refused to believe in the promises that he had been repeating again and again over the years. No one from that Sunday afternoon remained completely faithful to Jesus by the time Friday afternoon rolled. They had all changed, they had all wavered, they had all proved themselves to be just as fickle as anything else and anyone else in this world.

We probably shouldn't be too hard on the disciples though, because it sounds like us, doesn't it? We change all the time! We waver all the time! We are fickle and inconsistent and erratic all the time! And that doesn't just have to do with our emotions and our opinions and our preferences on any given day, that has to do with our faith too. You know what I'm talking about: We can be really nice one day and downright cruel the next. There are times when we are generous and giving and then time when we are completely self-centered. There are days when we do what we are supposed to do and our integrity is perfectly intact and we feel pretty good about the decisions we're making, but then it's like switch is flipped and we have a string of terrible decisions and our integrity is flushed down the toilet and we purposely do what we aren't supposed to do! And I'm not just pointing fingers here; I'm talking from personal experience!

Just because I happen to be a pastor don't think for a second that I have somehow managed to figure out the secret of being consistently Christian all the time. My faith fluctuates just like yours does. My faithfulness to God and to the words of his Bible swings widely from day to day. My loyalty and devotion to what the Lord wants instead of what I want is inconsistent at best and almost non-existent at worst. Oh, I try. I try to be who I should be, but I'm up and down and up and down and up and down. I'm spiritually unstable. I'm unsteady. I'm unreliable. The only thing that I am constantly doing is changing for the worse.

On a Mission

Jesus knows that about me. Jesus knows that about you. Jesus knows that about every sinful person in this world. And so as Jesus road into Jerusalem on that Sunday before his death, he knew how quickly the crowds would turn on him. He realized what they would say and what they would think and what they would do to him in just a few short days, and so he didn't get caught up in the warm reception he received by the crowds outside Jerusalem's walls. He appreciated the genuine praise of those who believed in him of course, but he didn't let that deter him from his goal. In fact, the only one that day who didn't change, was Jesus.

Jesus was on a mission after all. And that mission was the cross. He was determined to continue ahead towards an incredibly painful execution because that was the only way he would be able to win our forgiveness. And so even though he was well aware that these branches waved in the air would turn into fists and these shouts of praise would turn into screams for murder and this donkey that carried him into the city would turn into a cross that he carried out of it, he forged ahead. He did not waver. He did not hesitate. He did not change. He accepted the praise of the crowds that day, but he also accepted the beatings, the scourging, the mocking, the hate. He stood there and took the false accusations thrown at him and the badgering meant to

get under his skin and the unjust decisions handed down by those who were supposed to uphold the law. Without complaint he dragged his own cross towards the hill of his death. Without complaint he hung there without complaint as blood poured out of his body. Without complaint he died there – just like he said he would – when he was ready and at just the right time. And he didn't change. From start to finish Jesus didn't change. Jesus was resilient in his quest to save us. He was unwavering. Unstoppable. He refused to become distracted. He refused to be dissuaded. He refused to compromise. He was fixated on that cross. He was consumed by his plan to produce an empty tomb. And nothing was going to get in his way. Your life was on the line, after all. And your life proved to be more important to Jesus than his own.

Unchangeable

And this is not just an ancient story that happened a long time ago. Jesus' unwavering dedication to the cross and his unswerving commitment to rising from the dead means that you are forgiven. No caveats. No hidden stipulations. No pre-approval requirements. You're forgiven of everything from front to back and all of it in between. Because no matter how unsteady you are, no matter how unstable you are, no matter how unreliable you are, Jesus doesn't change. Jesus doesn't waver. Jesus isn't fickle. He's faithful. And his faithfulness is forever.

Isn't that nice to know as you step out of this building and into the "real world" again? Because everything changes. Your body changes, your mind changes, your health changes, your home changes, your job changes. Your children and grandchildren change, your parents change, the people you count on in this world the most change, *you* change. But not Jesus. The Jesus who road into Jerusalem so calmly and confidently on a donkey is the same Jesus who calmly and confidently holds you in his arms whenever you need him. The Jesus who boldly took that cross on his shoulder and made his way up to the place of his crucifixion is the same Jesus who boldly takes up every one of your problems right now. The Jesus who lovingly absorbed the pain and the punishment of the cross is the same Jesus who lovingly absorbs all of your worries and fears and guilt every day. The Jesus who powerfully cut death in half on Easter Sunday is the same Jesus who powerfully promises you that your death will end in life as well. Your Jesus doesn't change! He doesn't waver! He doesn't ever let you down.

Jesus is the One Constant. He is the only one you can truly rely on, the only one you can always depend on, the only one you can consistently count on. Jesus is the One Constant. In times of happiness and in times of heartbreak, in times of pain and in times of joy, in times of struggle and in times of ease, in times of death and in times of life, there Jesus is. Look at him ride into Jerusalem just for you. Look at him hang on that cross just for you. Look at him come out of that grave just for you. Look at him reign on his throne just for you. It's all for you! It's always for you! Anything that Jesus ever does is for you. And that will never change. Because he never changes. Just for you.

Amen.