Today’s Gospel lesson is fairly straightforward, that is once you familiarize yourself with the games that Jewish children in first century Palestine liked to play, and who isn’t interested in that. I mean many times after my family has finished a satisfying meal, we pick up *The Big Book of First Century Jewish Children’s Games* and either randomly find a game or go back to some of our favorites like *Hungry Hungry Herodians, Romanus Praefectus May I* or *Severan Bridge is Falling Down*. However, the game that Jesus is talking about today does not seem to have an official name. What it basically consisted of was children playing games in which they imitated what they had seen adults do. Jesus explains the situation in this way, “We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.” Put in our terms the children were playing wedding and playing funeral. But some of them are upset because they have decided to play wedding, by pretending that they were playing music, but then the other children refused to dance. So, in an effort to get things moving they decided to play funeral and began pretending to wail but the other children again did not join in. The games did not work because no one was following the leaders. And so what Jesus is saying is that one group has a set of expectations about how things should happen and then is upset when the other group does not do that expected action. Jesus then uses this example to castigate those who do not believe in him because he has not done what it is that they think he should be doing. They have declared the way a messiah is supposed to appear, and Jesus is not conforming with their decree. And from this understanding of Jesus’ pronouncement, I think, there are two very basic, yet essential lessons that we can learn.

The first is what Jesus meant for the original hearers to understand. And this lesson was essentially that we do not get to define what God looks like or what God will do. You have probably heard me say in the past that when we find God agreeing with and encouraging all of our behavior, we have probably moved from worshiping God to worshiping ourselves, because God will often confound our expectations. To be fully Christian we need to understand God for who he is, not who we think he should be. Not to be too overdramatic, but one of the main reasons that the crucifixion was able to take place was because enough people decided that Jesus could not be the messiah because he did not act the way that they believed he should act. And defining Jesus in the way we want is a very dangerous pastime and something incredibly prevalent in our age. For example, if you look at certain corners of Christian publishing you will often find books that purport to have a completely “new” understanding of Jesus. They will have names like *A New Christianity for a New World* or *Putting Away Childish Things: A Tale of Modern Faith*. And these redefinitions of Jesus even exist in popular culture in works like *The da Vinci Code*. And what you will notice in all of them is that by the time they are through with Jesus he looks a lot like the author of the book. When Dan Brown pipes Jesus dances. But this is not the worship of God, but worship of ourselves.

And now onto the second part of our discussion and this has to do with what happens on a more human level in the story Jesus tells. One group of children in the marketplace is upset because their will is not being done. They have come up with a really awesome idea and the other children fail to recognize the awesomeness of what they have given them. In their minds if the other children would just listen the world would be a much much better place. Well here is the thing the children are just as wrong on the level in which they are transacting as are the adults who were unwilling to believe in Jesus because he did not fit into the view of the messiah that they have generated. And so the lesson for our personal relationships is to not demand that people act in accordance with our will. And in a world fueled by the heady narcotic of our opinion having gotten six likes and two smiley faces on Facebook we are more prone than ever to believe that our opinion contains the elixir for the immanentizeation of the eschaton, but it probably doesn’t. So we need to spend more time in quiet contemplation with the God of the universe (the actual one, not the one who looks like us) before we start demanding that other people dance to the tune we are piping.

We need to live in the world as it actually is and worship the actual God of that world. It requires more of us, but so do most things that are worthwhile.