

The Gospel of Mark has a unique way of telling the story of Jesus

- When he revealed to his disciples that he's the Messiah, they were admonished to keep the news secret
- That didn't seem to be a problem for them, however, because they were so slow to comprehend the message
- The first time he heard it, Peter rebuked Jesus for saying so (*Mark 8:31*)
- The second time they didn't understand but were afraid to ask (*Mark 9:31*)
- Today's reading follows directly after the third foretelling of the Passion

The interesting thing about Mark's storytelling is that the reader (or hearer) of the Gospel knows the secret from the beginning

- Mark's very first words are, "The beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." (*Mark 1:1*)
- For us, there's no mistaking who's who in this story: Jesus is the Messiah and the disciples are fallible, even clueless, followers
- Knowing all this we're curious whether they will finally "get it" and disappointed at their desertion and Peter's denial of Jesus after his arrest
- The principal witness to the crucifixion was a classic villain, a Roman centurion who proclaimed, "Truly this man was God's Son!" (*Mark 15:39*)
- The male disciples were nowhere to be seen, and even the women who discovered the empty tomb fled in terror and "said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." (*Mark 16:8*)

This narrative presentation is the equivalent of a medieval knight throwing down his glove—it's a challenge to us

- We see the true picture, better than the people who knew Jesus personally, who heard him preach and witnessed his healings
- The question is, what are we going to do about it?
- What difference does this knowledge about Jesus make in our lives?
- How are we helping Him make a difference in the lives of others?

Just before today's Gospel reading, Jesus and his followers set off for Jerusalem

- The disciples were blissfully wandering down the road, but “those who followed were afraid.” (*Mark 10:32*) Rightfully so...
- So Jesus took the twelve aside and, for the third time, told them what would occur in Jerusalem: his betrayal and trial and crucifixion, and his resurrection on the third day
- Without missing a beat, James and John changed the subject: “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” (*Mark 10:35*)
- Imagine how Jesus must have felt when he heard this!
- The two disciples blundered on, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.”

If there were a prize for asking the stupidest question at the worst possible time, James and John would have won it

- In a massive understatement, Jesus replied, “You do not understand what you are asking.”
- Then he answered by asking another question, “Are you able to drink the cup that I drink?”
- We, the readers and hearers of this passage, want to jump up screaming, “No! They're idiots! He just revealed the heart of God's plan to them and all they can think of is personal glory!”

My friends, the joke is on us

- Those first disciples were clueless and preoccupied with their own business—the teachings of Jesus seemed to go right over their heads
- They denied and deserted him, letting fear rule their hearts when times got tough
- But in the end, they and their closest friends stepped up to the plate
- Empowered by the Spirit unleashed by Jesus' resurrection, they witnessed for him all over the known world
- They formed a community called the church, which has grown and spread for twenty centuries
- All that happened because they finally discovered the secret, the foundation of which Jesus revealed in this passage

“Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant...For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life...” (*repeat*)

- That's not so complicated, really, but it goes against everything our culture teaches us about individual achievement
- Greatness in the Kingdom of God comes not from worldly success, but from letting Christ rule our lives and then making a difference in the lives of others
- Instead of trying to get what we think we need, the focus is on what we can give to others—in the process receiving back more than we could have imagined
- That's what being a Christian disciple is about, and it's at the heart of our church family's identity
- The great ones among us—the leaders of our community—are not only models of discipleship but also help others to make a difference

Did you know that today is an anniversary? As of this week, Rev. Sandy has been serving at St. Timothy's for a year

- It takes some time to get to know one another, and I've come to realize that Sandy is a person who likes to color outside the lines
- Every month she takes our Eucharist service beyond the boundaries of this building: to the emerging seniors community at Wind Crest and to the inmates at the Adams County Jail
- What a wild combination, and what a witness to the kind of servanthood Jesus spoke about in the Gospel reading

Sandy is passionate about Adult Spiritual Renewal, and we can see her ministry taking off this fall with several new programs:

- the "Moms and Tiny Tim's" group, the Bible Study brunch, and a Quiet Morning she's preparing for early December
- The purpose is not to achieve spiritual bliss, but to recharge our batteries for serving others
- I should warn you to watch out for Sandy—she's a shameless provocateur, and you may not be the same after encountering her

Shanda Velisek is gone this week at the Genesis retreat—I told her this is a good time for me to talk about her

- After years of her leadership it's possible to take our youth groups for granted—but you'd have to travel hundreds of miles to find a comparable program in an Episcopal church
- Its orientation toward servant ministry is well-known through our annual High School Mission trip, but the related Junior High summer event was also amazing

- Dozens of volunteers supported twenty-five kids in serving all over the metro area: around the church and in Denver, with seniors and homeless teenagers, even helping children in Africa

What you may not know about Shanda is how she constantly reaches out to marginalized teens

- Kids who don't fit in or who get in trouble, kids struggling with difficult family situations and the temptations of the world—they're all welcome and accepted in our youth groups
- I've seen her support a young person at court hearings and bring back a kid who ran away from home
- Her little pink phone is a lifeline for youth who suffer from anguish and depression
- She shows them the unconditional love of Jesus and teaches them how he calls us to live

Since St. Timothy's moved to this building nine years ago, Shanda and others have dreamed of having a facility that could not only accommodate the numbers of our youth, but welcome more kids from the surrounding community

- You've seen the beginning steps of this project, which embody the heart of servant ministry: the Youth Group moved out of their longtime home and provided most of the volunteer labor to create our fabulous new nursery
- Now it's time to get moving on the Youth Center, which will occupy the entire complex at the north end of the lower level
- It's an amazing blessing to be able to double the youth group's space without adding on to the building, but we need your help to make this dream come true

Obviously volunteers are necessary for the construction, but other gifts are important as well

- Could you offer some time to help Shanda pack up supplies for storage in the new shed we're building?
- For those of you who are internet savvy, we need to sell a bunch of accumulated items currently stored in those rooms
- If you could post photos on Craigslist and monitor the sales, it would not only clear out extra stuff but also raise money for the project

The final example of servant ministry I'd like to share today is our Bishop, Robert O'Neill

- The word "Episcopal" means a church gathered around its bishops—through our membership in the Diocese of Colorado, Bishop O'Neill connects us with the worldwide Anglican Communion
- You may not know that in the past few years Bishop O'Neill has made a number of trips to Africa to meet with church leaders
- Those relationship deepened at last year's Lambeth Conference in England, when bishops from all over the world joined in Bible study and conversation groups, under the leadership of the Archbishop of Canterbury

Bishop O'Neill serves as Board Chair of Episcopal Relief and Development, the American church's primary outreach initiative

- When he met with our Vestry and Staff last June, the Bishop told us about an award-winning program they sponsor called "Nets for Life"
- We're all used to mosquito bites, but in sub-Saharan Africa they can be deadly, causing almost a million deaths each year, including two thousand children every day
- There are many programs seeking to combat malaria, but "Nets for Life" is unique for two reasons: one is its low overhead, with no paid staff on the ground
- How does that work? The insecticide-treated nets are distributed through village churches, where trusted priests instruct people on their use and follow up afterwards
- Our membership in the Anglican Communion, embodied by Bishop O'Neill's ministry, is making a difference among some of the world's most vulnerable people

Following Jesus means becoming a person who seeks "not to be served, but to serve"

- Instead of buying into our culture's obsessive drive to get what we want, we can turn our gaze to the needs of others
- By reaching outside ourselves, we both grow spiritually and satisfy our longing to make a difference in our world
- The leaders I've talked about are not only models of servant ministry—they draw people to join them, providing organization and support for your efforts

God has blessed us in so many ways—our challenge is to be generous in responding

1. First, by giving back the “first fruits” of our financial harvest—the money you donate to St. Timothy’s is helping to support the ministries of Sandy and Shanda and Bishop O’Neill
2. Second, the gift of your time and talents makes the wide variety of our ministries possible—touching the hearts of people both at the church and in the surrounding communities

When you make a difference for others, it makes a difference in your own life as well—drawing you closer to God and your neighbors

Can you drink the cup that Jesus drank? Can you join him in a life of generosity and service?

With God’s help, we not only can, but will!