

“In the end, it’s about how we discover who Jesus is for us,  
 what it means to follow him in a world hungry for the experience of grace.” \*

I’d say that’s a pretty good summation of today’s gospel.

Today’s passage is a turning point, about halfway through Mark’s gospel,  
 the first of three times when Jesus tells them about the fate that awaits him –  
*and them* – in Jerusalem.

It’s the first time he tells the disciples that he’ll be arrested, tortured and killed  
 by the powers that be,  
 and how, after three days, he’ll rise again.

He tells them, he *warns* them,  
 that this is exactly what they’re following him into.

That the grace of life into death into life again is what it means to follow Jesus.

This is good news, but it’s hard-to-hear news too.

And they aren’t ready to hear it.

You may have noticed that Jesus isn’t much for breaking things to ‘em gently.

He’s frank and passionate and without guile.

He’s also an excellent teacher and pastor.

So he starts by finding out where they are.

“Who do people say that I am?” he asks.

*Who do “people” say I am?* – opening up the conversation at a nice, safe distance.

And they give some nice, safe answers . . . John the Baptist . . .

the Old Testament figure Elijah . . . one of the prophets .

“But who do you say that I am?” he then asks. *Who do you say that I am?*

Peter gives an answer that is at once exactly correct – and not.

“The Messiah,” he says to Jesus. “You are the Messiah.”

Bingo --surely that’s the correct answer!

Surely, that’s who Jesus is, right?

Well, yes. And no.

Yes, Jesus is the Messiah – the longed for One of God come to love and heal and save.

But, no, Jesus probably wasn't the kind of Messiah they had in mind.  
Witness Peter taking Jesus aside to "rebuke" him for all that downer talk about suffering and death and even resurrection.

But Jesus gives even better than he gets,  
as he in turn "rebukes" Peter – for what? For being human?  
For setting his mind "not on divine things but on human things"?

Jesus doesn't give up on Peter or the other disciples or anyone else.  
He takes them as they are, loves them as they are.  
*Loves them too much to let them stay there.*

And so the gospel doesn't end there either.  
This is not the conclusion of Mark's gospel, but only the midpoint.  
It's not the first and only time Jesus tells them about  
the dramatic events to come in Jerusalem, but the first of many times.  
This new, intensified stage of the gospel begins  
with Jesus asking some good questions.  
Getting the disciples to have deep conversations within and among themselves.  
And listening. *Listening.*

"In the end, it's about how we discover who Jesus is for us,  
what it means to follow him in a world hungry for the experience of grace."

That quotation, read at the beginning of this sermon,  
is from a seminary classmate of mine,  
a fellow Episcopal priest and former rector of a number of parishes.  
It's not necessarily about this gospel passage,  
but from a talk about an organization he founded called Renewalworks.  
Does this sound at all familiar to you?  
We've been leaking it out these past few weeks  
in the bulletins and newsletter, emails and old-fashioned mail,  
and that bright green insert in today's bulletin.  
Now here it is popping up in this sermon.  
(Gee, I wonder if we're trying to get your attention???)

Renewalworks is a ministry of the folks who publish the "Forward Day by Day"  
devotionals some of us pick up in the back of church.  
It's a process to get us moving spiritually.  
To help each of us, as individuals and as a parish, grow spiritually,

to deepen our love of God, neighbor and ourselves.

Sounds wonderful, doesn't it? But how would we do such a thing?

Well, it never hurts to follow Jesus' example.

How about by asking ourselves some thoughtful questions.

Questions about our deepest hopes and beliefs and scripture and prayer and serving others?

Questions about not only what we hope for, but how we would want this church to help us along this path?

But, wait, we're Episcopalians – we don't much talk about this stuff!

Never fear, it all begins with a confidential survey that each of us age 16 and up fill out, either online or on paper.

Your responses will be as anonymous as you want them to be, collated by the folks at Renewalworks then sent back in a report for review.

If you normally get emails from us, then you have a link in your email right now to let you and anyone else in your household take this survey on a computer or your phone.

You could also go on our website and request the link.

If email's not your thing or you prefer not to take it online, that's ok, there will be paper copies at both entrances (or in the office during the week) that you'll return to this basket.

But here's the thing.

You've got to do it in the next three weeks.

You've got to do every question on the survey.

And you've got to give yourself a little time and attention.

I wouldn't try to multitask and do ten things at once as we often do.

Maybe make a cup of tea, say a prayer and enjoy it. *Enjoy it.*

Take it seriously, but not *too* seriously.

It's not the final word on your spiritual life,

but a catalyst to a great conversation about the spiritual journey we share.

In the weeks ahead, and in that green insert today,

you'll learn more about how a representative team of parishioners will be coached by Renewalworks

through four workshops this fall to explore where we've been,

where we are now, where we feel called to go and how we'll get there.

So thank you for taking this journey with us.

Thank you for giving a few minutes of your time to take the survey.

Thank you for praying for this process.

Thank you for rolling with whatever we learn and wherever we might be called next.

Thank you for who you are now.

Thanks be to God who calls us ever closer in love.

“In the end, it’s about how we discover who Jesus is for us,  
what it means to follow him in a world hungry for the experience of grace.”

*Amen.*

\*Jay Sidebotham, “The Questions We Ask” talk at the 2014 Convention of the Diocese of Washington, February 1, 2014.