

I want to break up these sermon notes into three parts:

1. An overview of the Gospel of Mark
2. A cursory analysis of one Greek verb
3. A reflection about my dream of life-giving service

**Broad overview** Mark can be broken down into the three “acts.” **Act 1** Jesus shows up in grand fashion with miracles, healings, and proclamations. Most love him, a few *really* don’t. **Act 2** Jesus is still loved, but confusion sets in. People adore him but want to control and shape him in their own image. The sons of Zebedee (today’s reading) want to be at the right hand of “Warrior Jesus.” In puffing themselves up, they completely *and* willfully forget what Jesus has said from the beginning. Act 2 ends with the transfiguration of Jesus (shiny Jesus). This is God’s answer to who and what Jesus is. **Act 3** begins after the transfiguration; Jesus chooses suffering by entering the holy city of Jerusalem. This is his answer to how he will lead with courage and humility no matter what (even at the cost of his life).

**Greek on serving** διακόνειν or diakonein is the verb is used for describing service:

- The angels serve Jesus when he is fasting in the desert: Mark 1:13b “he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.” Angels were *serving* him.
- Peter’s mother-in-law serves her family. Mark 1:31 (Jesus) took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her, and she began to wait on them. She began to *serve* them.
- The women who followed Jesus to his death at the crucifixion served him. Mark 15:41 “In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs.” They were *serving* him.
- Stephen is a “deacon” or server. Acts 6 διακόνειν shows up again but in a different form. “Select seven men from among yourselves to attend (*serve*) tables”.

**Meditation/Reflection** Serving is not servile. In our gospel today, the sons of Zebedee wanted to sit at the right hand of Jesus in power. It’s not just that they wanted Jesus to be a warrior who could fix Roman oppression. They were convinced that they were part of team miracle, and by extension, their membership on this team made them special. The irony of the story is that they will be special and will drink the cup that Jesus drinks and be completely on his team. Jesus probably ribbed them a little that there is no holy corner office waiting for them where they can boss people around.

I remember a priest once told me that I was precious and special... just like everyone else. I laughed like I thought it was funny, but inside it felt like an insult. I had the misguided idea that I should be catered to. I was so special that I should be served instead of serving. The irony of this: when I really remember who I am in God’s estimate, I find peace in forgetting myself in service of others.

This self-forgetting snapped into focus for me this week while watching the ridiculous, wonderful ‘creature feature’ called *Midnight Mass* on Netflix. It is not high art. If I told

you much of anything in the plot, I would be dealing in spoilers. But at the end of the series, there is a woman who is dying and meditating on life.

Myself. My-self. That's the problem....The body stops a cell at a time, but the brain keeps firing those neurons. Little lightning bolts, like fireworks inside, and I thought I'd despair or feel afraid, but I don't feel any of that. None of it. Because I'm too busy. I'm too busy in this moment. Remembering...

I remember that every atom in my body was forged in a star. This matter, this body is mostly just empty space after all, and solid matter? It's just energy vibrating very slowly and there is no me. There never was. The electrons of my body mingle and dance with the electrons of the ground below me and the air I'm no longer breathing. And I remember there is no point where any of that ends and I begin.

I remember I am energy. Not memory... Just in remembering, I'm returning home... Every star, every galaxy all of it... and that's what we're talking about when we say "God." The one. The cosmos and its infinite dreams. We are the cosmos dreaming of itself.

*Eastern gift* I know this quote is rooted eastern mysticism. I love it because it helps us think more broadly of ourselves as "star powered." We are the universe. We are huge and unfathomably small. Like I preached two weeks ago, we are a speck, on a speck, on a speck of the universe. We are the electrons of stars, and we are the dust of the big bang, and we will be folded back into the universe one day soon. This is the wisdom of the eastern-drop-in-the-ocean mysticism.

*Western gift* Our shockingly narrow and limited life still matters. The gift of the western traditions is our *personhood*. Our dreams, woes, and heartaches are important. The way we treat people has consequence. This might be the door to really living into what Jesus knew intimately, "The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve. If we love others *and* ourselves, we naturally live as servants.

*East / West balance* it's tricky.

- Too much of the west, you get purity culture and that oppresses women; rapture mania terrifying people into submission; and woke and/or offended Christians checking every word typed on the internet for offensive intent.
- Too much of the east, you get a Doris Day theology of *Que Sera, Sera (Whatever Will Be Will Be)*. You get Buddhists in Myanmar happily interring and killing Muslims and noble prize winners catering to military dictatorships. We all return to the ocean anyway so what does it matter?
- *Too much of either*, you get a mix and match versions of the above.

We are stars and stardust who can channel all that we are. We value the gift of being alive. We can value who we are while leaving behind our self-importance. This is the heart of my dream for a kinder, more compassionate, and easygoing world.

**Todd**