

As some of you might know, before going to seminary I taught High School science in the little cotton farming town of Lockney, TX, an hour NNE of here. I also served as one of the school's two drama coaches. As such, every spring one of our English teachers, Mrs. Jolly, and I would direct our school's entry into the UIL One Act Play competition.

One year, we had chosen a play that required the actors to answer a telephone 3 times. We found an old phone to use as a prop. The only problem was that we couldn't figure out how to do the sound effect of a phone ringing. We tried lots of different things: ringing various bells offstage, using a cassette tape of a real phone, but none of them were really satisfactory.

Then one day I took the prop phone and opened it up and saw that it still had a bell inside. With a little bit of work, and an old extension cord, and an electrical switch, and a half a roll of black electrician's tape, I re-wired the old phone so that you could plug it into a normal electrical outlet. Then someone could stand 50 feet away, push the button, and make the phone ring.

It was the perfect prop because it had its own sound effect built right in. It was also great for practical jokes, which some of the kids and I pulled around the school. The phone would ring, but when you answered it, no one was there. Then it could ring again. It was kind of like *Candid Camera*. We had lots of fun with that phone.

But then we ran into problems with the play. The rules said that any play longer than 40 minutes would be disqualified. It became apparent that our play was going to be too long. So we had to start cutting more and more scenes. We decided to cut one of the scenes with the phone, but I didn't think anything of it.

But even after these cuts, the play was still too long. Mrs. Jolly wanted to cut a scene that was one of the two remaining scenes with the phone. But for some strange reason, I got very defensive. I really dug in my heels. I kept coming up with all kinds of reasons why that scene needed to be kept in the play.

Eventually after much discussion, Mrs. Jolly got fed up and said, through gritted teeth, "Mr. Haney, is the scene really that important to the play, or are you just defending your phone?"

She was exactly right. It wasn't the play I was worrying about. I was just trying to defend my precious phone. I was placing my little, narrow agenda before my duty as a director of the play.

Before his conversion, St. Paul was also very good at putting his own agenda first. Paul at that time was still called Saul. And he worked very hard at protecting his Jewish faith. By his own admission, he was a violent persecutor of the Christian church, and was trying to destroy it.

And, he was a man who took great pride in his status. He was proud of his pedigree. He was proud of his intellect. He was proud of the hard work he had done. He had climbed the

ladder. He was on a higher rung than most others his own age. He was of the tribe of Benjamin, he was a Hebrew of Hebrews. He was blameless under the law.

Paul was very good at defending his telephone. But he missed out on what's important to the play.

But then Paul had a life-changing experience on the road to Damascus. Paul had an encounter with the living Christ. Paul was baptized in Damascus. Afterwards, he was a changed man. Instead of worrying about his own status, instead of worrying about his own prestige, Paul experienced a change.

It was the new Paul who was able to write the words from our Epistle lesson today: "It is not ourselves that we proclaim; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants, (as your slaves,) for Jesus' sake."

Paul placed Jesus first. And Paul placed others' needs before his own. Paul took on a new life. Paul took on the life of a servant. Paul was emulating his Lord. Paul became a servant in order to better follow Jesus, who came among us as one who serves.

Paul became a servant. Paul became a slave. Paul wasn't sold into slavery. Paul entered spiritual slavery voluntarily, so that he could better follow his Lord.

Following Jesus' example, Paul became a servant. If Paul were here today he wouldn't brag about being the author of big chunks of the New Testament. Paul wouldn't brag about being one of the most important figures in the history of the Church. Paul wouldn't brag about having churches all over the world named after him. Paul instead would proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord, and himself as a servant, for Jesus' sake.

Being a servant is not a very glamorous occupation. I've never heard a kid say, "Hey, when I grow up I want to be a servant."

Yet, Paul took on servanthood not out of any sense of frustration, not out of desperation, not out of guilt. Paul freely became a servant out of a sense of joy. "It is by Gods' mercy that we are engaged in this ministry," he tells us. 'Jesus is Lord, and I am your servant for Jesus' sake.'

As heirs of St. Paul's in church that bears his name, we have the calling to follow in his footsteps. We too are called to proclaim Jesus as Lord. We too are called to serve others in his name and for his sake.

When we forget this, it's all too easy to become territorial. When we forget this, it's all too easy to begin thinking that a particular piece of the church's ministry is our personal property, as our own private little fiefdom. We set up walls and begin to defend our own turf, our own specialized areas of ministry. When we do this, we fall into the trap of trying to defend our phones.

Instead, we must remember the play. We all are called to ministry, but we must remember that none of us has his or her own individual ministry. The ministries we're engaged in don't belong to us. We don't have our own private fiefdom.

Jim Haney doesn't have his own personal ministry. Dcn. Becky doesn't have her personal ministry. Each of you don't have your personal ministries. All of us are called, by the grace of God, to share in Jesus' ministry. And everyone who is baptized is called to share in Jesus' ministry of servanthood.

The catechism is very clear. There are four questions about the four orders of ministry.

What is the ministry of the laity? What is the ministry of a bishop? What is the ministry of a priest or presbyter? What is the ministry of a deacon?

And all four answers start exactly the same way. The ministry of lay persons, or a bishop, or a priest, or a deacon is "to represent Christ and his Church." To represent Christ and his Church. To represent Christ and his Church. To represent (or re-present) Christ and his Church.

In other words, in Paul's words, all of us are called to proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord, and to share in his ministry as his body, the Church.

It's ultimately not about us. It's about Jesus. We proclaim Jesus as Lord. We serve others for Jesus sake.

Ultimately, it's not about us. It's about God. It's about serving others with God's love, being vessels of his power, his grace, his presence.

That's why Paul also talks in our Epistle about clay jars. He says that we are like plain old ordinary clay jars that carry treasure inside. The treasure is God's presence and power. It's not about us. We are clay. We are dust and to dust we shall return.

But paradoxically, we clay jars have been entrusted with being ambassadors of the creator of the universe. We have been entrusted with sharing his power and love on his behalf.

We are called to be servants. We're not given God's power for our own egos. We are not called to ministry for our own self-aggrandizement.

As Spiderman said, "With great power comes great responsibility."

Or as Jesus originally said, "To every one to whom much has been given, much shall be required."¹

¹ Lk 12:48

We have been given God's treasure even though we are jars of clay. But much is required of us. And much of what is required of us is living with a new mindset, a new attitude.

We human beings spend time defending our phones, defending our turf, defending our status, defending our own egos.

Paul had those same struggles.

But he sought ultimately to forsake those sorts of things.

"We do not proclaim ourselves" he says. "We proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake."

Jesus taught us to pray,
"Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory."

Not mine. Thine.

We are jars of clay. God is the treasure.