This week I have been especially struck by a particular sequence of events in Mark 7-9. I’ve been reminded that we need to pay careful attention not only to the individual stories and teachings that we find here, but also to what order we find them in. The writers of these biblical texts didn’t just throw things together randomly. The order matters. The way things are connected tells a story in itself.

Think about this back-to-back sequence from Mark 8 and 9:

1) With some exasperation, Jesus asks his disciples: “Do you still not understand?”
2) Jesus heals a blind man, his sight is restored, and “he saw everything clearly.”
3) In a conversation between Jesus and Peter, we find out that Jesus is the Messiah, the long-expected one, the powerful leader who will save Israel.
4) Jesus explains that this Messiah will suffer and die, and that anyone who wants to follow must also suffer and die. Peter is horrified. This can’t be right.
5) The body of Jesus is transfigured—filled with heavenly light, glorified, transformed into the new creation of God before their eyes. Kingdom come.
6) Jesus rebukes the people for their lack of faith. Why do they need so many signs and wonders? Why are they longing for miracles? Don’t they see the bigger picture of what’s going on? (But even so, he heals the boy.)

We could go on, but this is enough. Look at what we learn by reading these stories together in order. How about this:

• The people long for miracles and signs and wonders, but Jesus is growing impatient. They’re missing the point. The truth he is revealing goes so far beyond mundane signs and wonders! He is trying to reveal a new reality to them that transcends and calls into question their whole outlook on the world.
• Jesus shocks them by teaching that those who want to be great must not try to climb the ladder—they must descend it. All the way down to being the servant of all, to suffering, to dying. This is the path of Jesus himself.
• And the RESULT of this path is this: what looks like the way downward is actually the hidden way upward. Only by the descending path do we reach the new creation. The suffering and dying is translated into the kingdom of God. The broken Messiah is the one who is transfigured before their eyes!
• This all seems like craziness to the world. Because there is no evidence that the downward path is the road to resurrected life. We know it is true only by faith.