

Scripture: Mark 1:21-28,40-45

Sermon Title: "The Impossible Secret"

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By a quick show of hands, how many of you have been asked to hold a secret for someone else? Okay, now anyone want to share a secret you are holding right now? That was just a little test – you all are good at keeping a secret and maintain those confidences. You know, in life it is inevitable that we will be asked to hold a secret. And secrets take all kinds of forms. There are the joyous secrets, like when planning a surprise party or having found the perfect gift for a friend or for your beloved. There are the gossipy secrets – "You didn't hear it from me, but" sort of secrets. There are hard secrets, when someone who trusts you deeply invites you into a place in their lives and in their hearts that they are not ready or able to share with the world just yet, but they trust you and need you to accompany them so that they do not have to hold this piece of their life alone. And all of these secrets, can be held in confidence and not shared. But today I want to talk about one secret. And this secret is impossible to keep.

In our gospel reading today from Mark, we begin to see this secret at work – this one has become known among biblical scholars as the messianic secret. When Jesus hears the unclean spirit naming him as the Holy One of God, at these words, he commands the spirit to be silent. It's like Jesus is saying, do not tell anyone who I am – my identity is a secret. And then again, after cleansing a leper he commands him to say "nothing to anyone" about what happened, and in turn, about who Jesus was, is, and forever will be. As Jesus offers these very first miracles of his public ministry according to the Gospel of Mark, it would seem that he does not want his identity as God's Son, as the Messiah, as the Christ, to be revealed. As his ministry is beginning, as he calling his first disciples and teaching with such power and authority that local crowds are seeking him to listen to him, it would seem that he wants to keep his identity a secret.

Now, of course to us as readers and believers today, there is no secret here. We already know who Jesus is and we proclaim it week after week, all throughout our lives. The

gospel of Mark even begins with, as its very first verse, a proclamation of “the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God”. So there is no secret anymore. In fact, while we can witness the messianic secret, this desire from Jesus for his identity not to be shared, several times and in multiple ways throughout the gospel of Mark, by the end, after the resurrection, the disciples are told something very different – they are being sent out to proclaim the Good News. So it would appear that, by the end of the book of Mark this is a secret no longer and we see that it was never meant to be an eternal secret. Still, this leads to the question of why the secret in the first place?

Throughout the earthly ministry of Jesus, most people, including the disciples, didn’t fully understand who Jesus was and, in fact, one could argue that they couldn’t fully know and comprehend what it meant to be standing in the presence of God’s Son, of the Messiah, of the Christ, until after they witnessed the power of the resurrection. And so this “secret” was not so much to hide the identity of Jesus as it was prepare the people for what they would soon come to know. They couldn’t know completely the power of Jesus, until they saw it in the way of an empty tomb.

Now, while it is interesting to think about how and when people could fully understand the depths of who Jesus was, I want to pull us back to just look at the experience of the leper in our reading today. After being healed by Jesus and commanded to say nothing, he of course, runs off and does what – says something! Now, when he left Jesus, he was not running off to tell of some profound theological revelation about Jesus. He was not going to proclaim what it meant for the Messiah to be in their midst - he probably didn’t know that he had just met the Son of God. All he wanted to do was share how Jesus had changed his life. How Jesus had touched him and made him clean. For when Jesus told him to not tell anyone, he gave this man an impossible secret to hold. For when our lives have been changed by God, when our lives have been touched by the love of Jesus, how could we ever be expected not to share?

There are secrets that we are called to hold from time-to-time and we should hold those confidences close to our hearts. But one that we can share freely is this – that in Jesus Christ, God’s love touched the world in a way that has forever changed and is constantly changing it. We need not keep Jesus a secret – for he is, in fact, the impossible secret. The heavens proclaim his glory, the earth is filled with his majesty, our lives are a living testimony. There is no way to hide it.

Beloved People of God, this is our call as the church of Jesus Christ, to proclaim the impossible secret. To share how, in Jesus, healing can be found – healing of not just physicals wounds but the wounds of our hearts. To share how, in Jesus, there is a love that enfolds us and holds us close forevermore as we are all beloved Children of God. To share how, in Jesus, there is a grace that is so sweet that it can mend the fractures of our lives, of our community, of our world. Yes, this is one secret that we are called to proclaim boldly – because it has changed us and it can change the world. May the words of our lips, the actions of our hearts and hands, and the ministry of this church forever proclaim the impossible secret of Jesus and his love. Amen.