

We heard a few Sundays ago of the Transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain, of the dramatic appearance of Moses and Elijah with him, of dazzling light and divine voices. One of you asked me this week about that moment and story and particularly why Jesus told Peter, James, and John, those who witnessed it, not to tell anyone about it. Why, when God shows up, would Jesus have required others to keep it a secret? That, of course, was not the only time. One of the features of the Gospel of Mark is the so-called Messianic secret; whenever anyone figures out the fullness of who Jesus is, whenever a miracle convicts and converts, Jesus quickly says, TELL NO ONE! Why, this lively, questioning, believer asked? Why would he who we call the hope of the whole world keep that hope to himself and demand others do so? Isn't the New Testament generally full of exhortations to share the good news about Jesus to the ends of the earth?

One thing is clear; Jesus was not a showman; not a magician; not running a healing and amazement circus for the people of Galilee. He didn't want a following in the way that Beyonce, Bono, or Lady Gaga has a following; people who saw the fireworks, awesome dance moves, and thrilling vocals at the Super Bowl and then downloaded her latest tracks from iTunes and became fans. When God did something amazing in Jesus, the Lord generally asked for a quiet, thankful reception of the gift. He didn't have any mass media to use for the movement, and I don't think he would have.

The Gospel of John, that we take up today and will read in for the rest of Lent, offers some more perspective on why Jesus did things that way. It was likely written last of the Gospels and perhaps deals with more of the questions later generations would ask than did Mark, the earliest. If Mark remembered that Jesus said, don't tell anyone, without explaining why, then John, a generation later, needed to seek an answer in the apostolic memory for Jesus' urge to silence.

You might remember what happened with the loaves and fish, what is remembered in the 6th Chapter of John. The great crowd ate a meal somehow derived from five loaves and two fish, with leftovers even, and many began to say that Jesus must be the one for whom Israel had been waiting. Jesus realized that they were about to push him forward, as some king of king, and so fled to a mountain alone. The crowds soon enough found him again, seeking more bread and also demanding more signs and miracles. Jesus discouraged them, saying that he himself was the true sign and that miracle-based response to him was not what he sought.

And so Nicodemus showed up at night and said the he know Jesus was from God, since Jesus did miracles. This was not the right way to start a conversation with Jesus. He wanted those who had been called to him by God, not those who found him impressive. He wanted people who believed in him, not people who thought he did cool God tricks. And so Jesus pushed back in conversation,
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