

## Last Epiphany B 2018

One of the fascinating features of the Gospel of Mark is its “Messianic Secret.”

Throughout, we hear Jesus warning those who have come to know him not to tell others what they have found.

Last week, we heard of his casting out demons in Capernaum, but that “he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.”

And today, after the manifestation on the mountain, “he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.”

I could give you ten more examples of Jesus “shhhing” those who were ready to tell everyone that he was the Messiah.

Why would this have been?

Isn't the Gospel to be proclaimed? Isn't Christ to be shared?

Certainly, but as Mark remembers it, Jesus seems to have avoided one way of spreading the news about him.

He did not want to be famous; he did not want rumors and exaggerated stories to spread across the country.

He would not be celebrated, like a false prophet or an ordinary rebel.

He wanted to encounter and be encountered.

Something more personal and direct was what he wanted to share.

He wanted people to make a discovery, I think.

And so he kept a secret and asked others to, for a time, as well.

There are secrets that are fun to have.

A young couple find out she is pregnant, which has been much anticipated.

But most keep that to themselves, for a while, and there is delight in having such a joyful thing just between the two of you.

The gifts we sometimes have for each other that we hide and anticipate giving,

Up in the closet, under the sweaters.

It is fun to know its there and wait for the day when it will be given.

And then there are the terrible secrets we carry, that are a painful burden.

Things done to us that we have to deal with forever.

And our failures, violence, and sin, that we have wrapped up inside as well.

There is no delight in such secrets as those,

And keeping such secrets is too much for some to bear.

They tell, and sometimes the light casts out the darkness of their shame.

Last fall, Ashley Harte talked about the work of hospice in our Adult Forum.

She told the story of a patient whose family wanted to keep his death a secret from him.

It happens all the time, in a certain kind of family.

The anxious adult children decide that mama or daddy should not know that the end (the new beginning!) is near.

This family asked hospice nurses to turn their badges around backwards and forbade any talk of death.

But they underestimated their father, who was old and had been very sick for a long time, and had more sense than his children.

“I am dying,” he announced one morning, “and there are some things I want to talk about.”

The children gasped and demanded to know who told him!

Of course, he just knew, and the elaborate secret-keeping was more a sign of the children’s anxiety, their inability to confront mortality, their lack of Resurrection hope, than anything else.

It was a similar dynamic as Elijah and Elisha walked from Bethel to Jericho to the Jordan.

What Elijah knew about what he was soon to face was not clear.

But somehow Elisha knew and the companies of the prophets knew.

And they wouldn’t talk to him about it. They whispered; be silent, said Elisha.

And then at the end, with the Jordan in front of them, the river, so full of meaning and memory,

The gateway to the Promised Land,

The river that called to mind the Red Sea,

At the last moment, Elisha understood that Elijah knew what was to come

And then they began to speak about the most important things.

I wonder what opportunities were missed, for this was a secret that wasn’t a secret.

Keeping it only shut down conversations that might have borne all kinds of fruit.

On the whole, secret-keeping is a sign that something is wrong, and most secrets should be told.

Jesus said you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

What ever is shared in the darkness, he said, ought be proclaimed from the housetops.

His parting words to the church at his Ascension were that we are sent to proclaim the good news to all nations, to the ends of the earth.

To pull off the bushel basket and let the light shine.

If your faith is a joyful secret, too long treasured in your heart, let it out.

Begin to speak of the goodness of God in Christ.

If you bear a heavy secret and want to share with a person of discretion, call me.

We are invited as disciples of Jesus, to be clear and transparent, to always move toward the light of God and to let it shine through us.

Until all the world is filled with Christ’s light, and the creation is made new.