

Sermon for Proper 19 Year B

The Text: Mark 8:27-38

Who do you say Jesus is?

Have you had someone share some exciting news with you, and then said but don't tell anyone yet? Most of the time it's because you are a close friend who they want to share their good news with but they're not ready for the news to go public.

Maybe it's the news that you are going to have a baby, but you don't want the news to go public because you want to make sure that all is well with the pregnancy. Yet you tell those you are close to.

It looks like Jesus wants to keep his identity secret within the circle of his disciples. When he asks who do people say that I am, they list off what they heard among the buzz of the crowd. John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets.

Then Jesus gets to the real pointy question: "Who do you say that I am?" Peter replies, 'you are the messiah'. Then Jesus warned them to not tell anyone.

Why exactly did Jesus tell the disciples to not tell anyone?

The way that Peter rebuked Jesus when Jesus told them that the Messiah must suffer and die revealed that he didn't understand Jesus' mission as the anointed One. It's like Peter says, "no way Jesus, this is not the way it is supposed to go. The Messiah is supposed to conquer the Romans, not get killed by them. What good is a dead Messiah?"

What if Jesus asked us: "Who do people say that I am?"

If we reply, 'well there are some who say you are only a prophet and some who say, you can't be God, then we can expect Jesus to warn us don't tell anyone. Why would he warn don't tell anyone? Because it's not the truth.

But it's not about what the crowd says, it's about who we say Jesus is.

As Romans 10:9 says, 'if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved'.

This is the truth Jesus wants the world to know. This is good news that is no longer to be kept to yourself.

We know the truth that Jesus suffered and died for our sins, because we could never make things right between us and God. So, Jesus allowed himself to be condemned as a blasphemer by Jewish religious leaders, mocked, tortured, and executed as a criminal by the Romans. We know the truth that Jesus felt abandoned by his Father, but was willing to bear this cup of suffering that we might know God and his love for us. That we are saved from our sins and given the gift of new life in Christ. With this new life in Christ Jesus calls us to follow him.

As we read through the book of Acts, we are perhaps envious of the courage and boldness of those who followed Jesus. In Acts 20:22-24 Paul says,

“And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace.

We have been called to the task of testifying to the Good News. Not just in church each Sunday, but also part of our everyday life. In the way we talk, the way we act, the way we share the Good News about Jesus as the opportunity arises.

Jesus called the crowd to him along with his disciples, and he calls us close to hear what he has to say as well. *“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.*

Jesus speaks of losing our lives *for his sake, and for the sake of the gospel.* Taking up our cross means being willing to suffer the consequences of following Jesus faithfully, whatever those consequences

might be. It means putting Jesus' priorities and purposes ahead of our own comfort or security. It means being willing to lose our lives by spending them for others -- using our time, resources, gifts, and energy so that others might experience God's love made known in Jesus Christ.

It means we let ourselves be open to being compelled by the Spirit, not knowing what's ahead but be willing to say: I'm in this race for you Lord and my aim is to finish the race and complete the task you have given me.

What is the task? To testify to the good news of the gospel.

How much effort are you willing to exert in this race that Jesus has called you into, and even started and completed for us? Jesus has won the race and is waiting for us at the finish line.

We are not on our own in this call to follow him. Just as God sent his Son, Jesus has sent the Holy Spirit to be our strength, our comfort, to fill us with the power and the energy that is needed to complete the task. So, are we tapping into the power of the Holy Spirit to seek the help that we need, or are we simple relying on our own effort?

The disciples did not yet know the truth of what Jesus as the Messiah meant, and at that point he was yet to go to the Cross to bring life to the world. That's why he told them not to tell anyone—the people wanted to make him a king by force. He came to rule by laying down his life to swallow up death by his own death.

Jesus wants people to know the truth about him. The warning not to tell anyone does not apply to us. Instead we are to let everyone know who Christ is, that he is the way the truth and the life. The important pointy question from Jesus still is: "Who do you say that I am?"

He is the one who has come to redeem us of our sins and give us eternal life. He is the one who laid down his life for his sheep, and the sheep that aren't yet in his fold.

May our thoughts, our words, our actions always be for the sake of this gospel. Amen.