

UNIVERSITY UMC OF REDLANDS, CA
“UNTIL HE HAS RISEN”

Mark 9:2-9¹

Sixth Sunday after Epiphany - February 11th, 2024

² Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, ³ and his clothes became dazzling bright, such as no one on earth could brighten them.

⁴ And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

⁵ Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us set up three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ⁶ He did not know what to say, for they were terrified.

⁷ Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” ⁸ Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

⁹ As they were coming down 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.

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Introduction.

Last Sunday I spoke very lightly to you about what is known as "The Messianic Secret" in the Gospel according to Mark.

Well, it is a resource that the evangelist Mark uses very frequently to present the truth and importance of the Resurrection of Jesus.

This resource presents us with Jesus performing many miracles, signs, and wonders as a demonstration of being the Son of God, but it immediately commands those who have received that manifestation to be silent... up to a certain point.

For example, after the casting out of the devil, according to Mark 1:25 "But Jesus rebuked him, saying, 'Be quiet and come out of him!' Jesus commands the unclean spirit to come out of man and to be silent.

And it is true, the message of salvation and the presence and ministry of the Messiah should be in the mouths of human beings, of believers, of Jesus' disciples, and not in the mouths of demons because they already know very well who Jesus is.

But now in this text, we find three believers, well... disciples, and more than disciples... apostles, whom the Lord commands to be silent...

⁹As they were coming down 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.

What is the reason for this mandate? What is the purpose of sending demons, and other people, and saving three of the apostles from revealing their identity?

Well, that's what I want to talk to you about this morning, about a truth that for us is fundamental to our faith, but for those at that time it was a risk, it was a real danger.

And he was transfigured before them.

Today's Gospel recounts the episode of the Transfiguration of the Lord. The Lord Jesus, on top of a mountain, meets Moses and Elijah, monumental figures of the Hebrew people.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is transfigured and radiates a light so white that there is no equivalent of that light on earth. From a cloud, a voice was heard saying, "This is my beloved Son: listen to him."

Witnesses of this event are the Apostles Peter, John, and James, who were invaded by a peace that came from on high and asked the Lord to remain on the mountain with Elijah and Moses.

They say to him, "Master, it is good that we are here! We're going to build three huts: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

...until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

How difficult it must have been for the disciples to come down from the mountain after the experience of the presence of Elijah and Moses and hearing the voice of God on the top of the mountain.

And then Jesus directly tells them to keep quiet about their identity.

This motive for discretion first arises in Mark 1:24-25 when He commands a demon to be quiet, and it is seen throughout this book. But why does Jesus do this? Doesn't He want people to spread the news about Him?

To begin with, it is important to note that Jesus' command to remain silent is part of a larger pattern of simultaneously revealing and concealing who He is, Jesus doesn't appear in secret at all.

He is visibly anointed by the Holy Spirit and was declared "Son" by the Father (Mark 1:9-11);
proclaims the kingdom/gospel openly in Galilee (Mark 1:14-15);

performs various healings in public (e.g., Mark 1:34, 2:1-12);
calms the storm (Mark 4:35-41);
feeds the 5000 (Mark 6:30-44);
participates in public debate with religious leaders.
it directly declares its atoning purpose (Mark 10:45); and so on.

On the other hand, Jesus sometimes does the opposite and hides Himself. Most prominently, of course, are His strict orders to three different audiences not to talk about Him: To the demons/unclean spirits, to the multitudes, especially vessels of healing, and, to the disciples.

Commands to remain silent seem to play different roles based on the audience, particularly the "outsiders" (who are not part of the inner circle of Jesus' followers) and the "insiders" (who are).

For those on the outside (Unclean spirits and multitudes).

With evil spirits, Jesus' command to "be silent" and "not reveal His identity" (Mark 1:24; 1:34; 3:12) comes right after the spirits shout that He is "the Holy One of God" (Mark 1:24) or "the Son of God" (Mark 3:11). Jesus forbids them to speak, then, "because they knew who He was" (Mark 1:34).

Being supernatural beings, they know who Jesus truly is, the eternal God. At this stage, Jesus didn't want the message to be spread, or He didn't want demons to be the ones to reveal it, or perhaps both.

With the various recipients of miracles and/or multitudes whom Jesus commanded to say "nothing to anyone" (Mark 1:44) or "to tell no one," the discretion motive works a little differently.

As soon as Jesus appears on the scene, comments about his miracles and teachings begin to spread like wildfire. With this comes all sorts of theories about who He is, including "Elijah... [or] a prophet, like one of the prophets of old" (Mark 6:15), resurrected John the Baptist (Mark 6:14, 8:28), and/or a Davidic king who would re-establish the monarchy of Jerusalem (Mark 11:10).

So, after several miracles, it seems that Jesus commands silence with two objectives.

First, He may be trying to prolong His ability to travel in the face of growing crowds (e.g., Mark 6:53-36). Regularly in Mark we see how Jesus sought solitude but was prevented by crowds; "He could not pass unnoticed" (Mark 7:24).

Second, He could be mitigating the spread of (mis)information about Him, to avoid arousing suspicion from His opponents (e.g., Mark 6:14), and to prevent things from getting out of hand prematurely. Ironically, however, "the more he commanded them, the more they proclaimed it" (Mark 7:36).

In other words, for outsiders, the motive of discretion relates to concealing who Jesus is, and is not, until the appropriate time of his true revelation is.

For those on the inside (disciples).

With Jesus' disciples, the command to be silent takes a different form. The first occasion comes after Peter declares that Jesus is "the Christ" (Mark 8:20), to which Jesus "sternly warned them not to speak of Him to anyone" (Mark 8:30).

The second occasion comes after the scene of the transfiguration (Mark 9:2-8), to which "Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone what they had seen" until after His resurrection (Mark 9:9).

Both scenes teach a crucial revelation of Jesus' identity: "Christ" (Mark 8:29, spoken by Peter) and "my beloved Son" (Mark 9:7, spoken by the Father).

The problem: The disciples just don't get it. Peter rebukes Jesus, resulting in a rebuke against Him (Mark 8:32-33); "they did not understand what I said to them" (Mark 9:32), and James and John argue about future privileges (Mark 10:35-41). Throughout the book of Mark, the disciples are shown to be slow-thinking and hard-hearted (Mark 4:13; 6:52; 8:17; 9:19).

So, Jesus commands them to be silent because they, despite their clear self-revelation, still struggle with misunderstanding.

For the intimate group, the grounds of discretion emphasize, not how Jesus kept his identity secret, but how the disciples failed to understand what He had revealed to them. It is not Jesus who is hiding the truth from them, but their hearts.

This makes Mark 16:8 even more apt: even after his resurrection, Jesus' disciples "said nothing to anyone because they were afraid." Mark's story ends in silence.

Conclusion

In short, Jesus' command to remain silent seems to be aimed at controlling the disclosure of information about Jesus, as well as the timing of its sharing: He is the Messiah and the divine Son, but that is only fully revealed in His death and resurrection.

Up to that point, misinterpretations resulted in screeching demons, growing crowds, and obtuse statements from the disciples.

And what about us readers of Mark's Gospel?

We know beforehand that Jesus is "Christ" as well as the "Son of God" (Mark 1:1). And we know how the story ends.

However, we also struggle with misunderstanding. We, like the multitudes, can be drawn to the wonder-working Jesus and ignore His call to suffering.

We, like the disciples, may want a "Christ" of our design but not the one who dies on the cross. We, too, may feel the inner urge to say nothing to anyone about the Son of God.

May Mark's call to discretion, then, remind us that secrecy no longer exists. We are under the complete revelation of Jesus. Nothing is hidden.

So, let's not be silent.

Amen.