

St. David's Episcopal Church

Feb. 11, 2024

Tammy Shackelford's Sermon

Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." And was quickly told not to tell anyone.

Six days later, Peter, James and John watched as Jesus was transformed before them and once again, they are told not to tell anyone.

Imagine their confusion. Imagine keeping a secret like this, knowing that Jesus is the Messiah your people have been waiting for, yet you are not allowed to tell anyone.

You have heard the voice of God, and yet, you are forbidden to tell anyone!

This is big news! This is good news! Yet you cannot tell anyone until the "Son of Man has been raised from the dead." What does this even mean?

We know exactly what this means – but at the time, Peter, James, and John had no idea what was coming. You wonder if they were prepared at all for Christ's death and resurrection. They had heard him talk about it, but were they prepared?

This story reminds me of the time my son Jesse was in fifth grade, and he brought home a letter from school explaining that the next day students would be divided into two groups – boys and girls – for an hour-long class about their bodies and the impending wonder of becoming men and women.

Well, I was ready for this. I asked Jesse if he would like to talk about becoming a man with me or if he wanted to wait and hear about it in school?

He said he would like us to talk about it.

So, believing him to be ready to hear all about the wonder and glory of becoming a man, I launched into a full-length discussion (more of a lecture) about the birds and the bees. We talked about everything (if you know what I mean.) When I finished, I asked Jess if he had any questions. “No,” he said, “I think I’ve got it.”

The next day after school I eagerly asked, “Was it like what we talked about?” “NO!” Jesse said emphatically, “It wasn’t like our talk at all.” I was crest fallen, I thought that I had done an excellent job of explaining things. “So, what did you talk about if it was not like our talk?” I asked. “Well,” Jesse said, “**We talked a lot about deodorant.**”

And then it hit me. Jesse and his classmates were not ready for our talk. His teachers knew that fifth graders first needed to understand what was going to happen to their own bodies before learning about the “Birds and the Bees.” *I was sure I had ruined my son for life!* I was worried about him, but also worried that he would tell his friends. I immediately told him NOT to tell anyone about our talk until they learned about it at school.

Listen again to a part of our Gospel reading...

“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.”

In these words, I hear my plea to Jesse not to tell anyone about our talk. Peter, James and John had seen and heard things that Jesus' followers and the other disciples were not ready to see or hear.

Are we ready to hear and understand what it means that Jesus is the Messiah. Are we ready to understand what it means that he is God's Son, the Beloved?

Our reading begins six days after Peter admits to calling Jesus the Messiah. Six days since Jesus began telling the disciples about the great suffering and rejection he would face prior to his death and resurrection. And on this day, Jesus takes Peter, along with James and John, up a mountain for what would be a most singular "Mountain Top Experience" known as "the Transfiguration."

If you look up the definition of transfigure, it means to "transform into something more beautiful." Imagine the disciples sitting on top of a mountain enjoying the beautiful day when suddenly Jesus begins to change in physical appearance. He has a glow about him that is not coming from another light source - he is the light source. Furthermore, his clothes have become a dazzling white, like never seen before.

And then, as if things are not unbelievable enough, two men appear with Jesus. The disciples recognize them as famous figures from the past, Moses, the great man who delivered God's covenant and law to his people, and Elijah, the prophet, who will come again prior to the coming of the Messiah. Before they even know what is happening, a cloud towers over them and they hear the voice of God saying, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" When the cloud clears,

the disciples look around - no doubt dazed - and realize that Elijah and Moses are no longer there, and they are one again alone with their friend Jesus.

On the way back down the mountain, Jesus charged Peter, James, and John not to tell anyone what they have seen until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

As Christians we know what Jesus is talking about. We know the story of his suffering, death, and resurrection. But were we, are we, **ready** to hear it? Are we ready for Christ to reveal himself to us? Are we open to having our hearts and minds changed by understanding the reality that God became fully human yet remained fully divine and offered himself as a sacrifice for our sins? Are we prepared to comprehend his resurrection? And are we prepared for the day when he will come again?

Getting ready to hear and understand this enormous secret is NOT like preparing to go on a trip. We cannot just make lists, check them up off, pack the bag, show up at the airport, get on the plane and arrive at a Destination Revelation. Nor can we sit around waiting for a burning bush, or a glowing angel. We must open our hearts to hear the still small voice of God and be willing to be in conversation with it.

Author of the book "Mysteries of Faith," Mark McIntosh compares getting to know Christ to getting to know a good, dear friend. He writes, "Think how, as you come to spend more and more time with a person, you come to know more deeply who she is. That is only possible because at the same time *you* are being changed by your friendship with her - sometimes brought up short, sometimes delighted, sometimes wounded in your pride, sometimes healed, and forgiven. All

these changes in you are the means by which you come to know your friend more and more, because knowing someone in that intimate way is only possible through a process of transformation and growth – sometimes painful, always unsettling – by which you and your friend come to share life together.”

I want to spend that kind of time with Christ – to share life together. I want to be ready and open for my own transformation as I grow in my relationship with him, knowing that I will not be the same person I was before committing myself to a relationship with Christ. As author Mark McIntosh writes, a relationship with Christ, “... tugs you out of the life you have settled into.... It sends you into soup kitchens and night shelters, to hospital bedsides and communion rails, it exhausts you and gives you life...” But am I ready? Are you?

This Wednesday we enter the season of Lent. While some Christians associate Lent with a time for penitence, Lent is also a time of preparation. Historically, adult candidates would spend the 40 days of Lent preparing for baptism with fasting, prayer, and intense instruction culminating in the Easter Vigil and receiving first communion at dawn on Easter morning. I am not suggesting that we spend the next 40 days in intense instruction, but I am suggesting that Lent is the perfect time to prepare to hear the secret and understand its implications for your life, by committing yourself to a personal relationship with Christ, or strengthening the relationship you already have. We must remember that to get the most out of this relationship we must be willing to change. To open your heart to the moments when Christ reveals himself to us – not in mountain top moments like the transfiguration, but in the mirror when you see the “Light of Christ” shining in your own eyes. Or, you never know, Jesus may reveal himself to

you in a parking lot. Yes, one of my mom's favorite songs is "I Found Jesus in a Parking Lot." The lyrics are wonderful...

... It was a still small voice on a Tuesday night
Like You were right there with me on the passenger side
You turned that car into a mountain top
Oh, I met Jesus in a parking lot.

When and where will you meet Christ? Who knows, I have seen the majesty of Christ when watching the sunrise, and suddenly, I am filled with gratitude for the dawn of a new day and the many blessings of my life. I have known the presence of the Holy Spirit when words come to me that I know are not from my brain, but are from the heart, and this can ONLY be the Holy Spirit. And God revealed himself to me in the moment that I first held my babies. In those precious moments I understood that God loves me the same way I love my children, unconditionally, unending, inseparably.

I am grateful for these moments of revelation – but I also wonder how many moments I have missed because I was filled with anger, frustration, hatred, or disappointment. How many times was I so preoccupied with MY agenda that I was deaf to God's call to me?

This Lent I want to find ways to be more intentional, disciplined, open, and prepared to hear and understand the secret that Peter, James and John had to hold onto. The good news that Christ is the Messiah, the Son of God, the Beloved, AND he wants to be in relationship with me. Over the next 40 days I want my life to be simplified so that the still small voice of God can be magnified.

Will you find ways to hear (and understand) the secret this Lent? It may mean spending a little more time learning about “deodorant” so that we are ready to hear about the “birds and the bees,” but I think it will be worth it. And then, on Easter morning we can say together “Amen. Allelulia! Allelulia!” because we will know and understand the big secret – and we will never be the same again.