

Have you ever had someone ask you a question that that you just didn't know what the right answer was. Albert Einstein was tired on giving speech after speech so one night he switched places with his chauffer who resembled him in looks and manner. Einstein sat in the back row wearing the chauffer's cap and jacket. The chauffer gave a beautiful rendition of Einstein's speech and even answered a few questions. But a pompous professor trying to show off asked a difficult question on anti-matter formation. Without missing a beat, the chauffer said: "Sir, the answer to that question is so simple that I'm going to let my chauffer answer it."

One day Jesus and His disciples are walking along the road, and He asks them a very insightful question. The discussion is so important that it is recorded in three of the four gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke. This morning let's look at this event as recorded in the sixteenth chapter of Gospel of Matthew, verses 13-20, and see how this discussion and the answer apply to our lives today.

Read Matthew 16:13-20

During the seven Sundays of Lent, we focused on how we would answer the question that Jesus asked the disciples in verse 15: "But who do you say I am?" I hope and pray that our discussions helped you grow closer to the Lord during that time. Since we spent so much time on that question, I thought that we should dig a little deeper into this story as a follow-up to Lent to see what additional insights we can learn.

Now there are two key points that I want us to look at from this story. First, as they are walking down the road, Jesus asks His disciples: "What do people say about me; who do they say that I am?" The disciples start listing several prominent Jewish figures – John the Baptist, Elijah the great prophet, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. Traditionally, these were believed to be the forerunners of the Messiah, the long-awaited anointed one of God sent to redeem Israel and to restore it to the power and prestige of the days of Kings David and Solomon. By giving these traditional answers, the disciples were taking the easy way out. By indicating that Jesus is just preparing the way for the Messiah, they could wait or delay making any commitments to follow Him or to change their lifestyles.

But Jesus is never satisfied with a half-hearted or lukewarm answer, so He presses them; have they been listening to Him and have they not seen what He is able to do. Forget what the people think; what about you? who do you say that I am? who am I to you? Then Peter boldly declares: "You are the Messiah, the Christ." Jesus asked this question over 2,000 years ago, and as we discussed during Lent, He is still asking the same question to us today. Who am I to you; who do you say that I am? That's basically what religion is all about folks – who is Jesus and what is our personal relationship with Him.

Now if Jesus was to ask some congregations today, who do you say I am, they might reply: "Methodist, Baptist, Catholic, Presbyterian, liberal, conservative, Democrat or Republican." However, they would all be wrong. For you see there is no generic answer that you can memorize or an answer that fits all. The true answer can only be found in our hearts; it is our own personal belief. Each of us is unique in the eyes of God and thus our relationship with His Son is also unique and personal.

The second key point that I want us to consider this morning is why did Jesus tell the disciples to keep His identity a secret? As you read the gospels, you find Jesus constantly telling the disciples and others to keep His identity a secret. Now there are three possible explanations. First, Jesus did not want to create a popularity contest. Jesus did not want people to follow Him simply because of the miracles He performed; He wanted them to believe in Him and follow with Him all their heart.

Second, the people, and even the disciples, completely misunderstood the concept and purpose of the Messiah as foretold in the Old Testament. They were looking for a conquering hero, someone to drive out the hated Romans and restore Israel to the fame and power of Kings David and Solomon. They didn't understand that Jesus came to rule from the heart, and not from a throne. And finally, Jesus' time had not yet come. There was still a lot He had to teach the disciples in order for them to carry on His ministry. It was basically not time for Jesus to play His hand. However, this event did mark a turning point in Jesus' ministry. For now, Jesus leaves the countryside and sets His eyes on Jerusalem and His destiny with the cross.

Now for the remaining time we have this morning, let's focus on verse 20 where Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about Him. Unfortunately, this is the one commandment or teaching of Jesus that most people obey. This is the one teaching that the church and Christians take to heart. We are extremely obedient at keeping quiet and not telling anyone about our Lord and Savior.

Of course, this is not what Jesus meant. Jesus followed this temporary call for silence with the more powerful instruction in the Great Commission found in Matthew 28:19-20. Listen again to Jesus' final instructions to His church: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." Jesus said GO and Make Disciples! This is not a passive statement; it is full of action verbs. We are not to keep quiet. We are called to spread the Good News and to tell everybody we meet about our friend Jesus.

We all like to share good news with others. Have you ever been so excited about some good news that you couldn't wait to tell someone? About a marriage, a promotion, new baby, grandchild, homerun by your child, making all A's, new car, or a good medical report. But what

about God, all that He has done for us, our relationship with Him? Do we ever get so excited about how God has blessed us that we can't wait to tell someone? When was the last time you heard about a preacher having to tell his congregation to keep quiet about their faith and the presence of God in their lives?

While our faith should be contagious, we as Christians have become very skilled at quarantine. Once out of the church door, not a word, we blend right into the world around us and keep our mouths shut. However, Jesus wants us to tell the story, the story of Easter - the Good News that God so loved the world that He sent His only Begotten Son to live among us, to teach us, to die on a cross on Calvary for our sins, and on the third day to rise and defeat the grave and the devil forever. He now sits at the right hand of God as our friend, mentor and advocate. Because Jesus lives, we can face each and every day with the hope and the assurance that we are loved and that we have a place with God. That's what Jesus wants us to share with others. With such great news, it's a wonder that we can keep it bottled up inside; it should almost make you want to explode.

When Judy and I lived in Santa Fe, we had a pest problem – a mouse in the house. After I was unsuccessful in trying to get rid of it, Judy convinced me to call an exterminator. Well while he was working in the house, Judy naturally started talking shop – church business. You should have seen this gentleman light up. It opened a door for him, and he got to telling us how wonderful his church was and what a great service they had the previous Sunday night. He was so full of the Holy Spirit that you see and feel it. I thought to myself at the time, if we could all be like him, what a difference we could make for Jesus Christ.

Now you are probably saying to yourself right now, it's okay for Reuben to say that; after all he's the preacher and that's why we pay him the big bucks, but I live in the real world. What will people say if I start telling them about Jesus and what He means to me? What if they reject me, aren't receptive, or worst, make fun of me?

However, we need to remember that there are people all around us who are eager to hear about Jesus, wanting to hear some good news. The point is that you don't have to be a preacher, teacher or evangelist to tell the story. The disciples weren't. They were just ordinary people just like you and me. But looked what happened when they didn't keep quiet – they turned the world upside down.

Now we can learn two things from the disciples. First, when they had the opportunity, they told the story. They shared what Christ meant to them and His teachings. Now we all hate it when someone comes up to us and asks: "Are you saved," and then start preaching to us. This just turns people off. A better approach is to share when the opportunity or situation is right – in everyday life experiences and conversations. Such as when someone asks why you are so

calm when those around you are panicking during a crisis. Or someone makes a comment about all the people who are in need and you tell them about the church's efforts to feed the hungry. Or someone shares a problem with you, and you tell them that you will pray for them. It's all about building relationships with people and then sharing our faith when the opportunity presents itself.

Second, the disciples lived out their faith in their actions and daily life. As I have said before, each of one of us is a Living Bible. When others recognize you as a Christian they will watch how you react under the problems and demands of daily life. As Christians, we may be the only Bible some people ever read. I have asked this question before - if you and I were put on trial this morning for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict us? How would our co-workers, friends, neighbors, and family testify? Would they say – oh yes, they are definitely a Christian; they live out their faith in their words and actions? Or would they say – they're a Christian? You're got to be kidding, why they are just like the rest of us, and in some ways worse!

Does our Christianity end when we go out these doors and extend only to the parking lot? Is it like the value of a new car, decreases the minute we leave the parking lot? Or do we carry Christ with us into the world and our daily lives? We tell the story of Jesus by how we live.

In his book *Our Father, I Believe*, a former pastor of mine, Warren Lathem, tells the story about a man who didn't believe in going to church. He would fuss at his wife when Sunday dinner was late. Once in a while the pastor would come by and try to talk to him. But he would be rude and tell the preacher that all the church cared about was his money and the number of people on its membership role. Of course this would embarrass his wife. Occasionally, the pastor would bring a visiting evangelist and say here's o'toughie. The man must have told visitors from the church over and over that all they wanted was his money and didn't care for him personally.

But one time, he didn't say this. He was in the Veteran's Hospital, and his son rushed across the country to be with him. His weight was down to 74 pounds and he couldn't speak anymore. His son looked around the room which was filled with cards and flowers from the Men's and Women's Clubs, Bible Classes, the youth and other fellowship groups at the church.

His father saw him looking at the cards and took a pen and wrote this line from Hamlet: "In this harsh world, draw your breath in pain, to tell my story." His son asked: "What's your story, Dad?" He wrote: "I was wrong! I was wrong!" This gentleman found Christ and salvation because of the love and persistence of fellow believers just like you and me. With love and gentleness, they helped him find his way.

Who is the toughie in your life? Who is God calling you to share His love and the good news of Jesus Christ with? We all are called to sow the seeds of the gospel, to nourish it with love. A successful witness is someone who shares the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and leaves the results up to God. We need to live out our witness to those who we are trying to reach and then take them to the Lord in intercessory prayer. God will do the rest.

God has given us a precious gift. He wants us to share it with others as He gives us the opportunity. It's a free gift; the price has already been paid for by the blood of His Son. Because He has already paid the price, we can offer it to others free. There are no hidden strings, just great and eternal rewards.

The devil loves it when we take Jesus' words out of context to not tell anyone. We make him happy when we walk out of here and blend into the world around us and keep our mouths shut. So, let's not keep quiet; let's shout it from the mountain tops. Let's make the devil mad and tell everyone we meet that Jesus Christ is the Lord of our lives and that He lives in our hearts.

Because of you, someone, a family member, friend, neighbor, co-worker, may find salvation and peace of mind because you shared your faith with them through your words and actions. Don't keep it a secret any longer; someone's place in eternity may depend on you and your willingness to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with them. Don't keep quiet! Let's make some noise! Amen