

Has someone ever asked you a question that that you just didn't know the answer to? One day Jesus and His disciples were walking along the road, and He asked 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 how the Gospel of Mark records this discussion in the eighth chapter, verses 27-30.

Read Mark 8:27-30

Now there are two key points that I want us to look at in 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, and other prophets such as Jeremiah. Traditionally, these were believed to be the forerunners of the Messiah, the long-awaited anointed one of God sent to redeem Israel and believed by many at that time to restore Israel to its ancient power under Kings David and Solomon. By giving these traditional answers, the disciples were basically 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.

However, Jesus is never satisfied with half-hearted or lukewarm answers, so He presses them; have they been listening to Him and have they not seen the miracles He has done. Forget what other people think; who do you say that I am? Who am I to you? Peter then boldly declares: "You are the Messiah, the Christ." Jesus asked this question over 2,000 years ago, and He is still asking the same question of us today. Who am I to you; who do you say that I am? This is one of the main questions that our Wednesday night class is addressing. Who is Jesus Christ to us? That's basically what religion is all about folks – who is Jesus to us and what is our relationship with Him.

Now if Jesus asked some congregations today who do you say I am, they might reply: "Some say 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 that fits all. The true answer can only be found in our hearts, because it's our own personal belief. Because each of us is unique in the eyes of God, our relationship with His Son is also unique and personal. Now if you have never sat down and thought this out, I strongly encourage you to take some time and write down who Jesus Christ is to you, what is your relationship with Him, and what role does He play in your daily life. I promise you that it will be time well spent.

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? Throughout the gospels, you find Jesus constantly telling the

disciples and others to keep His identity a secret. Now there are three possible reasons for this. First, Jesus did not want to create a popularity contest. Jesus did not want the people to follow Him simply because of the miracles that He was performing; He wanted them to truly believe in Him and follow Him with 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 before they were ready to take over His ministry. The time was not right for Jesus to play His hand. However, this event did mark a turning point in Jesus' ministry. Jesus now leaves the countryside and sets His eyes on Jerusalem and His destiny with the cross.

Now in time remaining this morning, let's focus on verse 30: "Jesus ordered them not to tell anyone about Him." Unfortunately, this is the one command or teaching of Jesus that most people still obey; that the Church and we Christians have taken to heart. We are extremely obedient at keeping quiet and not telling anyone about our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Of course, this is not what Jesus meant. Jesus followed up this temporary call for silence with the more powerful command 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." This time Jesus didn't say don't tell anybody; He 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.

Now 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 an upcoming vacation, winning the lottery, a new grandchild, being on Jeopardy, or a good medical report? But what about God? Do we ever get so excited about what He has done for us or our relationship with Him that we can't wait to tell somebody? However, when was the last time you heard 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 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 from the grave defeating death and the devil

forever. He now sits at the right hand of God as our friend who intercedes for us. Because Jesus lives, we can face each and every day with the hope and the assurance that we are loved and that we have an eternal place with God. That's what Jesus wants us to share. With such great news, it's a wonder that we can keep it bottled up inside; it should make you almost want to explode.

Now you are probably thinking right now, that's okay for Reuben to say; 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 talking about Jesus and what He means to me? What if they reject me, aren't receptive, or even worst, make fun of me?

Once before the advent of television, there was a lady who lived up in a remote part of the Smokey Mountains, completely isolated from the world down below. She was born there and had never been off the mountain. She knew nothing about God or the Bible, so one of her neighbors felt sorry for her and sent a preacher to visit her.

When the visiting preacher knocked on her door, the mountain lady came out onto the porch. The preacher asked: "Are you a Christian?" "No, I'm a Republican," she answered. "Sister, I'm afraid you are in the dark," said the preacher. "Yes, I guess I am," she agreed. "I think I'll get John to cut another window in the house when he gets home."

"Does John fear the Lord?" "I guess he must," she said, "because he took his shotgun with him when he left." "I mean does he have salvation?" "Yes, he does. He has it real bad in his right hip," she replied.

"Sister would you like to go to heaven?" asked the preacher. "I don't really know about that," she said. "John and I have been thinking seriously about leaving here and moving to Texas." "Sister, do you have any idea why I'm up here today?" "No, I guess I don't." "Well, I'm up here in these mountains looking for lost sheep," he said. "Is that so? Well, I saw three yesterday afternoon and I told John those sheep were lost," she explained. "But I think they belong to ol' man Mitchell who lives on the next mountain."

"Well, let me ask you this: are there any Methodists up here in these mountains?" "Shoot yeah! John caught one last week and I can tell you that I had a heck of a time skinnin' it," she said. "Tough as leather, too."

Obviously upset with his inability to get his message through to the mountain lady, the preacher came right to the point and asked: "Sister, don't you know that Jesus Christ died to save sinners?" "He did?" she exclaimed. "Well, I'm real sorry. I didn't even know He was sick. If I had known that I would have sent Him a jar of jelly."

The preacher turned to leave, but made one last attempt to get through to the mountain lady: “Well, Sister, I’ll see you in the Promised Land.” “You might see John and the kids,” she replied, “but I hardly ever go anywhere myself.”

Now that’s probably the worst case scenario of trying to witness to someone. But the truth is that there are people all around us, especially during this time of confusion and uncertainty, who are eager to hear someone tell them about Jesus. 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 look what happened when they didn’t keep quiet – they turned the world upside down!

We can learn two things from the disciples. First, when they had the opportunity they told the story. They shared what Jesus 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 others 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 when someone shares a concern with you and you say that you’ll 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 us is a “Living Bible.” As Christians, we may be the only Bible some people ever see. I have asked this question before: if you were put on trial this morning for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you? How would your friends, neighbors, and family members testify? Would they say – oh yes, they are definitely a Christian; they live out their faith in their words and actions? Or would they be surprised and say – a Christian, you got to be kidding, why they act just like the rest of us!

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 Christ by how we live our daily lives.

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. 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 that they didn't care about him personally.

But one time, he didn't say this. He was in the Veteran's Hospital very sick, 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 different 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 your story." His son asked: "What's your story, Dad?" He wrote: "I was wrong! I was wrong!" This gentleman had found Jesus Christ and salvation because of the love and persistence of fellow believers who lived out their faith. With love and gentleness, they helped him find the 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 are each 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 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. 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 right into the world around us and keep our mouths shut. So let's not keep quiet. 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, or co-worker, may find salvation and peace of mind because you shared your faith with them through your words and actions. Don't keep your faith 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! Tell them about Jesus, and then invite them to church or some of our activities, such as the cookout! I challenge you to invite at least two people to church as we approach the holidays. Amen