

Some Secrets Are Made for Shouting

Preached Palm Sunday (April 14) 2019

Luke 19:28-40 and 23:13-25, 44-47

Secrets generally fall into two distinct categories. There are secrets that we guard with our very life because they are connected to some deep personal shame within us. We may carry these secrets for a lifetime and never come close to revealing them to another living soul. Because we can't bear the thought of the rejection that would follow. Ironically, the only way to break the power that such secrets hold over us is to confess them to a safe person who can receive the secret with grace and help us to cease letting it define us.

There are also secrets that we hold onto for dear life because the impulse to share them with the world is so great. But the telling of them would be a betrayal of the person who has sworn us to secrecy.

In either category, the outcome, for better or worse, of telling secrets has a lot to do with timing and context.

It turns out that even Jesus had secrets. Or, at least, one big secret. This secret even has a name: The Messianic Secret. If you've ever read a story in one of the Gospels where Jesus does something miraculous for someone and then orders them to not tell anyone about it, you have encountered the Messianic Secret.

In Luke's Gospel it says that people were bringing the sick to Jesus to be healed. Among the ones he healed there were some who were possessed by unclean spirits. At the sight of Jesus, the demons came out of them, shouting, "We know who you are! You are the Son of God!" But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Messiah. Jesus healed lepers and

ordered them to tell no one about it. He brought a 12-year-old girl who had died back to life, and then commanded her parents not to tell anyone what happened.

One day, Jesus asks his disciples who people are saying he is. It's almost as if he is checking in with them to gauge how well his big secret is being kept. Then he asks the disciples, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answers, "You are the Messiah of God." Whereupon Jesus sternly orders and commands them not to tell this to anyone.

There are a number of theories about why Jesus might want to keep his identity as the Messiah such a big secret as he went about his ministry. Perhaps the most important clue to the mystery surrounding the Messianic Secret is the reason he gave for the disciples keeping Peter's statement about him being God's Messiah to themselves. He said, "The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."

It sounds like Jesus was living according to a plan and a timetable that nobody but him and his Heavenly Father could comprehend. One that was inching inexorably closer to an outcome that, by all conventional expectations of a Messiah, would appear to be an epic failure.

When Jesus let his small band of disciples in on this secret, maybe it was to prevent them from attempting to deter him from fulfilling his destiny. And when he commanded them to not go around broadcasting their knowledge that he was the Messiah; it might have had something to do with averting a possible derailment of that destiny by a potential army of dedicated but misguided supporters.

Whatever drove Jesus' need for secrecy, that need apparently expired on the day he drew near to the gates of Jerusalem on a donkey, for the last Passover he would ever celebrate. As with most secrets, the

breaking of the silence behind which this one was kept came down to timing and context. And, clearly Jesus knew that the time and the place for revealing the Messianic Secret had arrived.

Not that he entered Jerusalem waving a “Meet the Messiah” banner. But maybe he might as well have. Because, by riding a donkey into the city, Jesus was deliberately acting out an ancient Messianic prophecy. In the Old Testament book of the prophet Zechariah (9:9) it says: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

The disciples—perhaps taking a cue from what Jesus was doing—tossed their own fuel on the fire, by what they were shouting as they accompanied him into the city. Usually, pilgrims entering the city for Passover were greeted with these words of Psalm 118: “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord.” These were joyous words of welcome for those who had often made long and tiresome journeys to celebrate Passover in the Temple.

But as Jesus approached Jerusalem, it was his disciples who were singing this Psalm. With one very significant difference. Instead of, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord,” what they shouted was, “Blessed is the *king* who comes in the name of the Lord.” The image of Jesus on a donkey fulfilling Zechariah’s vision of God’s chosen Messiah; surrounded as he was by a multitude announcing the arrival of a king who comes in the name of the Lord meant that the time for secrecy was over and gone.

The crowds who followed Jesus into Jerusalem that day cried out, “Hosanna!” Hosanna is what we shout as we wave our palms on Palm Sunday. The literal meaning of Hosanna is, “Save us!” Which is exactly

what people were expecting the Messiah to do when he came. Save them.

All this raucous, joyful noise was a release of praise for all the deeds of power they had seen Jesus do. All the healings he had performed. All the mouths he had miraculously fed. All the broken lives he had made whole. All the deeds of power, in other words, that Jesus had ordered them to keep to themselves and not tell anyone about. On this day, all that pent-up energy that had been stifled behind a wall of secrecy finally erupted.

And the weird thing is—this time Jesus did nothing to try and stop it. Even when some concerned religious leaders in the crowd told Jesus that he should order his disciples to stop all this, Jesus answered: “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.” There is a time, a place and a reason for secrets to be kept. And there is a time, a place and a reason for truth to be shouted, not silenced.

At another time, Jesus had advised the disciples that: “Nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. Therefore, whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered behind closed doors will be proclaimed from the housetops.”

Soon, the joyous shouts of “Hosanna” which declared the truth about Jesus being the Messiah who came to save us, would be replaced by the angry shouts of “Crucify him!”; which exposed the shameful truth locked secretly and for dear life, within each one of us. The truth of our tendency toward rejecting God.

The truth that he came to save us from.

And from there, things went the way Jesus had predicted; not how his disciples hoped and expected. The way that Jesus seemed to have known all along it had to go. For our salvation.

In a way, the Passion of Jesus remains a well-kept secret, spoken more in whispers than proclaimed from housetops. All one needs need to do to elude its mention is to avoid the Holy Week services of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, and slip comfortably from the “Hosannas” of Palm Sunday to the “Alleluias” of Easter. But, I encourage you to come and experience the Maundy Thursday service and a time of personal reflection by doing the Good Friday Walk to the Cross or walking the Labyrinth.

Some secrets are made for shouting, and as you will discover, this is one of them.

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