

252 Telling The Secret

(Note: This blog entry is based on the text "Telling The Secret", originally shared on February 15, 2023. It was the 252nd video for our YouTube Channel, Streams of Living Water (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCB7KnYS1bpHKal.2OseQWCnw>), co-produced with my wife, Rev. Sally Welch.)

What's the secret that was the hardest for you to keep? I guarantee that three of Jesus' disciples had one that was way harder. But we don't have to keep that secret anymore. Today, we're going to find out what it is.

We've had some chilly weather in Southern California this past week. Snow is continuing to accumulate, but it's mostly in the mountains. You can go there if you want to, or you can just look at it and enjoy it from afar.

Which reminds me of a visitor to a deep southern state who passed by a church that had a nativity scene displayed out front. The wisemen, a common image in the Church's current season of Epiphany, were dressed like firefighters.

The visitor had to know, so he went into the church office and said to the secretary, "I was just driving by, and I had to come in and ask, 'Why are the wisemen in your nativity scene wearing firefighter clothes?'"

"Well, that's just the trouble with you Northerners," she said. "You don't know your Bible!"

"What?" said the visitor.

"The Bible clearly says that the wisemen came from a 'far.'"

Some of us could use a 'far this week to keep us warm.

Though, what we think of as "cold" depends on what we're used to.

I grew up in Wisconsin where it's said that there are four seasons: Almost Winter, Winter, Still Winter, and Road Construction and I used to go jogging outdoors. I would dress in layers and run through the winter as long as the temperature outside was above 20 degrees below zero.

When I came to my first church in California and winter came, people asked me if I was still running outside now that it had gotten so cold. It was 60 degrees outside!

It depends on what we're used to.

And, as the Norwegians say, "There's no such thing as bad weather. There's just inadequate clothing." Three disciples would learn how to put on Jesus Christ.

Jesus took three of his first and closest disciples to “a high mountain”, by themselves, and gave them a vision of eternity. We see it in **Matthew 17:1-9**. It starts with **verses 1-2**,

¹Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. ²And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white.

Peter had just confessed his faith in Jesus six days earlier. He had said it out loud in front of God and everybody. It was the first time anyone had said in Jesus presence what the others had been thinking, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Peter confessed that Jesus was the one that they had been waiting 1,000 years for and that Jesus was God. “Six days” is how Genesis describes God’s Creation of everything that exists out of nothing.

Something good was about to happen again after six days. The creative hand of God is about to be revealed again six days after the confession of St. Peter.

Jesus **shows** them who he is in his heavenly glory. He is transfigured before them, and his face shines like the sun and his clothes become dazzling white. And when they were still trying to process this, he reveals who he is in his earthly mission, in **verses 3-4**,

³Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. ⁴Then Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”

Moses was the person through whom God gave the religious Law that defined the life of God’s people. Elijah was the great prophet, a person who spoke with God’s voice. Together they represented the Law and the Prophets, aka what were then known as the Scriptures and are known to us today as the Old Testament.

Peter, who we already know is often the impulsive one, seems to be still trying to figure out what this all means. He proposes that the three disciples build a housing development, three dwellings for Moses and Elijah and for Jesus. He wants to keep them there. He wants to preserve the moment.

Then, before Jesus can respond, we see the meaning of the Transfiguration in **verses 5-8**,

⁵While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!”⁶When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. ⁷But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Get up and do not be afraid.”⁸And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

I was once speaking with one of the moms at a parents' night for the preschool that the church I served in San Dimas ran. It turned out that she was an obstetrics nurse in a regional hospital. It was the same hospital where the father of one of our son's best friends served as an obstetrician. I had gotten to know him when we and our sons had gone on a 50-mile canoe trip with our sons' Boy Scout troop.

"Oh, do you know Dr. _____?" I asked.

"Yes," she answered. "He's a good doctor. And a good man!"

Isn't that a very nice thing to say about a person? And I was able to share it with him.

Jacob Collier is a Grammy Award-winning multi-faceted multi-instrumentalist musician with a four-octave vocal range and a creative appreciation for music theory. He spent a residency at MIT developing software with MIT engineers that could create complex harmonies from a melody in real time. I watched a documentary about that residency in which a professor at MIT said that Jacob Collier made him believe that there is divinity in the world.

Isn't that a very nice thing to say about a person. I was happy that the documentarian shared it.

But God speaks at Jesus' Transfiguration and does more than pay Jesus a compliment. He declares who Jesus is and what God thinks of Him and states that Jesus should be listened-to.

God speaks from a cloud and says, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"

That's a **very** nice thing to say about someone, and much more! And I am happy that we are in a position to share that news with the world, that Jesus is more than fully a person that Jesus is also fully God.

The disciples knew their Bible, and they knew that people don't enter into the divine presence of God and live. So, the disciples fall down, overcome by fear. And what does Jesus say? "Get up and do not be afraid." Jesus is fully human being **and** fully God. When they are in the presence of Jesus, they are in the presence of God, yet Jesus calms their fear.

It's been said that the words "don't be afraid" or "do not be afraid" or "fear not", or something like them appear 365 times in the Bible. I haven't counted them. 😊, but if that's true, there's one for every day of the year. And I do know that God can be counted on.

The disciples were having a mountain top experience. They had been told that Jesus was going to suffer and die in the previous chapter, in **Matthew 16:21**. Now they were being given the big picture of what it all meant. That's what mountain-top experiences do.

The traditional site for the Transfiguration is Mt. Tabor, about 9 miles from Nazareth. It's not much of a mountain, but it stands out on the plain near Nazareth. I climbed it when I was a student on a semester abroad in college and it's no big deal. I climbed it in the rain, though, and when I got to the top, the Greek Orthodox monastery there was not taking in tourists. So, I climbed down in the rain. I did not have a mountain top experience.

The three disciples did have a mountain-top experience, but they couldn't stay on the mountain-top either. Nothing grows on mountain tops. Valleys are where the soil is fertile, where things grow and transform. And Jesus and the three disciples came down from the mountain top to walk the path that led to the cross.

The disciples wanted to build dwellings. The best memorial to God's saving work, though, is in living the redeemed life.

And then Jesus makes a very strange request. No. He gives them an order, in **verse 9**,

⁹As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

Not only does Jesus not want to let the disciples stay on the mountain top, not only does He not want them to bask in God's affirmation, Jesus does not want the disciples to tell anyone about what had to be the greatest experience in their lives!

Why? Why not have them tell everyone about this experience. Wouldn't it validate who Jesus was. Wouldn't it make his path easier? And theirs?

No, that's not how faith works.

Jesus did lots of miracles. And he had thousands of followers when he was providing free food and medical care. But what happened to them when that all stopped? His "church growth" graph dropped to zero.

Faith is what comes through an open heart. It comes from God when God comes to dwell within us and to make us new. Action follows faith.

Remember when, in **Luke 16:19-31**, the rich man was in Hades and Lazarus, the homeless guy who lived at his gate, was at the side of Abraham and the rich guy asked Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his brothers about Hades? Abraham replies, "If they

do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.”

We encounter the one true living God through the Bible. Faith comes through hearing the word of God. It transforms our lives; we change and grow.

The whole Bible is Spirit-filled and we are filled with that same Spirit that comes through the encounter with the living transformative presence of God in the reading of the Bible.

Did you watch the Super Bowl?

Did you yell at the screen, “A penalty? That’s not a penalty!” or “It’s a run! A run!”

It’s easy to know what’s going on when you’re not on the field.

Do you watch the gameshow, “Jeopardy”? Do ever find that you know the answer to a question and none of the contestants do, so you’re yelling at the screen “Spore! Spore!”

Every question is easy when you know the answer.

But, you know that they can’t hear you, right? So why do we do it? Because we can’t believe that the people we see don’t know what we know.

Why would Jesus need to tell his disciples not to tell anyone about what they had seen, until “after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead”?

I think that it was because he didn’t want people to believe in Him for the show. I think that He wanted people to receive the gift of faith in Him because of what He had done, the love that he was about to show by giving his life on the cross for the redemption of the world, validated by taking his life back again and rising from the dead.

I think that He wanted people to see that the only life that lasts is the life that comes from God.

I read a story once about a preacher who had delivered a sermon on the struggle of serving God in the world in the army of the Lord.

Afterward, a man came out of the worship space to shake the preacher’s hand and said, “I too have served here for many years in the army of the Lord.”

The preacher said, “Really? I don’t remember seeing you at worship before, or in any of our community activities or ministries.”

The man leaned forward and whispered, “I’m in the secret service.”

Don’t be that guy.

There is no secret for us to keep.

We live on the "after" side of "until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

We live because of what God has done to reconcile us to God's self.

We live to tell what was once a secret to the world.

We live mostly in the valleys of life where we are called, equipped, and sent to serve, where things change and grow and are transformed.

What was once a secret we now proclaim to the people we know and to the world that we do not know but that God does.

We live on the other side of the Resurrection. Jesus has been raised from the dead and because He lives, we shall live also.

We live to make known what was once a secret to the disciples and to follow Jesus with them down the mountain to our local communities and into the world.