

**Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Proper 16**  
**Year A**

**Leaks**

**[RCL] Exodus 1:8-2:10; Psalm 124; Romans 12:1-8; Matthew 16:13-20**

“*You promise you won’t tell anyone?*” is usually the preface of a juicy story. It means someone trusts us, wants to confide in us, thinks we can keep a secret, or at least thinks we will only leak it out to one person at a time.

Secrets are hard to keep. Have you ever kept one for a year, two years, ten years, without telling anyone? Have you ever kept one for an hour? A really good one?

Secrets want to be told. They want to be disclosed and they usually come out eventually. Just watch any detective show and you’ll see that in the end, everybody talks to someone. Or you could just watch the news, as experts ponder “leaks” from government agencies and the meaning of such secrets.

Secrets are like beach balls being held underwater; they want to pop to the surface, they want to be leaked out.

Jesus, at the end of our Gospel lesson, tells the disciples to keep his identity a secret. His conversation with Peter about his identity as the Messiah is deep and profound. Peter’s confession is lauded as a monumental achievement and Peter is granted so, so much authority and power because of this.

And then Jesus tells his disciples not to tell anyone he is the Messiah.

Do you really think they could keep this secret? Could you have kept this secret?

When the first disciples meet Jesus, this is the question on their minds: is he the Messiah? Is this the promised one, the anointed one, the one we have been looking for, generation after generation? They were really asking, “Is there anything to hope for?”

And Jesus showed them there *was* something to hope for. He showed them in miracle after miracle that he was the Messiah. And here, in Caesarea Philippi, surrounded by Roman and Greek gods, Jesus asks a pointed question.

“Who do you say that I am?” Jesus asks. Opinions abound, in their day and in ours, about who Jesus is. How one answers this question matters a great deal in this text—and we should consider carefully how *we* answer it. From this story, we can be sure that simply saying what we’ve heard other people say isn’t enough for Jesus. Jesus wants to know what we think; Jesus wants to know who *we* think he is.

Can we also be struck by the fact that Jesus wants to know what people say about him? He's not too cool to ask this. Jesus has a real relationship with his disciples and like all good relationships, it's mutual. There's a back and forth, a sharing of life. Jesus isn't polling the whole Judean countryside. He wants to know who his disciples think he is. Peter blurts out, "You are the Messiah, the son of the living God."

How does he know this? How do you know this?

Jesus says it's an awareness, a knowledge that comes directly from God. And there's power in knowing Jesus is the Messiah. It's the power to withstand the gates of Hell, to hold the keys to the kingdom, to bind on earth and loose in heaven. In this one small moment of spiritual awakening, Peter gets all the tools he needs for his life's work.

Maybe that's all we need here today. Maybe we need the certain knowledge that Jesus is the anointed one, the promised one, and that we have hope. Maybe this will change the world.

So why did he tell his disciples to keep it a secret?

Well, we do know a couple things about how Jesus operated, especially before he went to Jerusalem. He told people to keep quiet his work and identity a number of times. Perhaps he was controlling the timing of his ministry, the timing of his death, and the timing of how he would redeem the world.

We also know Jesus was not real big on public displays of faith, if a person's heart was not right. The Pharisees cornered this market. Jesus hated their behavior and called them out on it.

And maybe Jesus is telling the disciples to keep this secret because he is like the Hebrew midwives who lie to Pharaoh, keeping the births of the Hebrew babies secret, so they can save the newborns. Jesus knows that his new and fledgling flock needs to grow stronger before he can depart. He wants to protect them; he protects them with his secrets.

Maybe Jesus is like Moses' parents, who secretly put him in a basket and launch him out in the river with the faith that God would care for him. By hiding him in the basket, they kept the secret of his life so he could live.

The Secret of Jesus' Messiahship is to be guarded, kept, and only told to the few who can hear it. Jesus' parables were meant to confuse and confound, to cloud the mind of the proud and disinterested and to give life to those who were seeking hope and life.

And if you're bold, let's take this secret just a bit further. Jesus' pronouncement to Peter, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven," has often been understood to relate to our Sacrament of Reconciliation. This power to forgive sins that Jesus exercises is scandalous, and he gives this power to his disciples, who carry it to the ends of the earth.

There are secrets disclosed and kept in the confessional. There is the secret sin that is confessed by the penitent. Maybe it's not a secret, but it usually is. It has usually caused an infection in the soul and it needs to come out. And then there's the secret of forgiveness. After the absolution, the priest or Christian you've confessed to never talks about it again. In fact, the priest never even talks about it with you again. Now *that's* a secret.

Maybe the secret of Jesus' identity is more training in how to exercise the power of binding and loosing, through secrecy, not mass marketing. This secrecy of his anointing is what gives him authenticity.

And this is how we evangelize. We internalize the secret of Jesus' Messiahship, who he is and what he came to do, to the point where it just comes out like a secret we can't keep to ourselves. There is an old saying that what we hide, we become. If we hide and conceal evil, we become evil. If we hide good things, especially the good things we do, we become good.

It is worthwhile to ponder this secret, even if we cannot figure out the riddle completely. It is clear from this story that Jesus wants us to contemplate who he is. I wish I knew the answer, but that's the problem with a secret, don't you know.

Or, maybe, just maybe, Jesus knows his disciples can't keep a secret and that they are going to leak his identity all over the Judean hillsides, and fishing villages, and synagogues, and dinner tables. Maybe he knows this about them and this is his strategy for getting his message out, one whisper at a time.

Maybe this is his strategy for us today. Maybe he wants us to leak it out too, one whisper at a time. I dare you to try to keep this secret.

*The Rev. Dr. David W. Peters serves as a chaplain in the Army Reserve and as the Associate Rector of St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Austin, Tex. He is the founder of the Episcopal Veterans Fellowship, the author of two books, the father of three sons, and is married to Sarah Bancroft.*

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