

Listening for the Promise

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 18) – September 8, 2024

*“And [Jesus] entered a house and did not want anyone to know,
yet he could not be hidden. ... And Jesus charged them to tell no one.
But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it.”
– Mark 7:24, 36 –*

The Big Reveal

In Mark’s Gospel, Jesus is trying to keep a secret. Repeatedly he urges his followers not to reveal who he is or what he has done. But why? After all, Jesus is healing the sick, exorcising demons, and raising the dead. That can’t help but attract attention. People always flock to someone who listens and touches and makes things right, so it’s puzzling when Jesus enjoins his disciples not to spread the word about their miracle-working Master.

In light of the whole Gospel story, however, Jesus’ reasons for guarding his identity might be understood. For centuries before Jesus’ incarnation, God’s people had languished under oppression. The immediate context of Roman rule fueled Jewish longing for another Moses who would deliver them into political freedom. Jesus had come to save them, but not to fulfill their expectations. To avoid encouraging unrest, Jesus suppresses the crowd’s early enthusiasm and reveals his true identity sparingly.

This secret keeping is even more important because Jesus possessed a superior mandate. Managing public zeal fulfilled the divine timetable for Jesus’ ministry, death, and resurrection. Early on, Jesus had resisted his brothers’ urging to show himself in Jerusalem, saying, “My time has not yet come” (John 7:6). Later, as he prepares for a last meal with his disciples, he tells them, “My time is at hand” (Matthew 26:18).

But even as Jesus hushed the growing furor, he continued to show who he is by what he did. In that way, he is a paradox — the secretive Savior who shines as a light on a hill. His life announces: Ultimately, the kingdom of God cannot be hidden. It is not a flash in the pan but the steady, allsearching beam of a lighthouse over the vast, dark deep.

The salvation of God is an eternal, life-altering reality that upsets the ordinary order and overcomes evil. It frees the prisoner even of chains of his own making. It astonishes our expectations and delivers infinitely more than we can ask or think. So, today be strong and have no fear. Your God has come to save you. And miracles will be the sign.

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