**James 2:1-10, 14-18, Mark 7:24-37**

The More He Charged Them, The More Zealously They Proclaimed It

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Who here has ever kept a secret from someone? It’s not necessarily an easy thing to do, unless you forget. Carrying a secret comes with a great deal of trust, for suddenly if the information you have been entrusted with gets out, the leak can easily be found. It also comes with a great burden. Sometimes it can cause you a dilemma or to question whether or not it is a secret that is worth keeping. Basically, being told to keep a secret is a big display of trust. You certainly wouldn’t trust just anyone to keep it quiet, no you trust a confidant. In our Gospel lesson for today, we see that Jesus charges his disciples to keep a secret, and we also see, that the more Jesus commands them to keep quiet, the harder it is for them. And why not? They’ve followed Jesus all throughout Judea and have seen some pretty miraculous things. They’ve seen Jesus walk on water, feed 5000 people, and heal dozens more. They’ve seen him change water into wine at a wedding, and they’ve seen him put down all those who question him and his teaching. They have certainly seen Jesus do a lot of things. Yet Jesus tells them not to tell anyone. Why? Certainly, if we were his disciples we wouldn’t listen to him. We’d tell him that he needed to be out in the spotlight, making himself and his deeds known. We’d tell him to do interviews and to write books and to be on TV. If we were witnesses of the great things that Jesus had done we would not be silent about it. But that still doesn’t answer the question of why. Why didn’t Jesus want people to know about his work of healing? Why didn’t he want the word of his deeds to spread? I imagine it probably had to do with something I like to think of as the lottery effect. Now what I call the lottery effect is this, think about if you won the lottery. How many people do you think would come up to you to be a “friend” and oh by the way I have an investment opportunity for you. Why do these people want to be your friends? Because of something that you have, money. They don’t want to be your friend because they care for you, but they want something that you have. I think the effect was similar for Jesus. I imagine that as people flocked to Jesus, some did not come to hear him speak the word of God, some did not come to hear his message of salvation, instead, these came for selfish reasons, that they may have earthly healing and no more. It makes sense that Jesus would want to keep this a secret because even a work such as the healing power of Jesus, can be turned into a selfish thing.

Don’t you think it’s kind of interesting that throughout scripture we hear that the disciples were told not to tell people about Jesus and yet they did it anyway? Yet we are charged to tell people about Jesus now, yet the church in America has been in steady decline for over 50 years. We have been charged to tell the good news of Jesus, yet how many days go by where Jesus isn’t even a thought in our conversations? How many opportunities to share Jesus do we pass up because we’re afraid we don’t know enough, we’re afraid of being mocked, or we simply forget? The silence of Christians is deafening. It is causing people to do and say things from inside the church that are completely contrary to what scripture said. Just this past week, during the hearings for Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavenaugh, a Methodist minister stated the following, “Jesus directs us to advocate for a just society that allows people to live their lives to the fullest. In John 10:10 Jesus says, ‘**I have come that you might have life, and have it to the full.**’ And this means supporting access to affordable birth control, because by permitting individuals to plan if, whether and when to become pregnant, birth control allows us to live our fullest lives.” I just want to say that there are so many problems with this that I could be here all day breaking this down and tearing it apart. I do want to make it abundantly clear that while this minister may use tame language like “birth control”, she actually means abortion. In reality this is an amazing thing. On the record of the United States Senate Judiciary Committee, there is now a minister, a person that to their congregation, is standing in the stead of Christ, telling them that Jesus said “Live your life to the fullest” and you can interpret that to mean whatever you want it to. The silence of the church in correcting such heresy is putting Christians in an untenable position. In the days of Jesus he commanded his disciples to keep quiet, and they couldn’t. He has told us to share the good news of his Gospel, and we remain silent.

We may feel as though we just don’t have anything wonderful to share about Jesus. It’s not like we actually get to see him, or have witnessed first hand the miracles, everything we know about him as a person has already passed. But this is where our thinking starts to go wrong, because Jesus is still very active in our world today. We read about miracles like this, where Jesus heals the deaf man, and we wonder where that healing power is in our world today. Yet what is it that Jesus is doing with the deaf man? Sure, he is healing his ears and loosening his tongue, perhaps there is even a medical explanation for the conditions that this man had. Yet we know that this man’s body was imperfect because of sin, because he was born into a fallen world. And so, what is it that Jesus is doing to this man in order to make him hear? He is healing the sin that this man was born with. Can you see the connection? Jesus heals this man from the sin that corrupted his body, physically and spiritually. And in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ the same healing is offered to you. We may live in a country where the Word of God means little to nothing, but is regarded as a collection of ancient stories. But in these ancient stories we see that the God that cleansed people of their sin, who opened their ears to hear his Word, is the same God that works to cleanse us today. We may not come to church in order to be healed of our illnesses, but in a way we are. We come here and we are healed of our disease of sin. We are declared healthy and fit for duty, and we are given a mission, to declare the Gospel. We should be like the disciples, we should be telling everyone about Jesus, the Son of God. For Jesus is not some great state secret. And like James shows us in our Epistle lesson, when we live a life of faith, we can’t help but do good works. When we live a life of faith, we can’t help but worship God, we can’t help but serve our neighbor. When we live a life of faith, we can’t help but be an example of the Gospel. My friends I urge you, live a life of faith. Share the news of Christ wherever you go. For Christ is a secret that should be shared abundantly and frequently. And we will find, that when we live our lives for Christ, we can’t help but share what it is that he has done. Amen. Now may the peace of God which surpasses our understanding keep and guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus now and forever. Amen.