

Tell No One Until....

A Sermon by Rich Holmes on Matthew 17:1-9

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The story of the transfiguration is a story in which Jesus took Peter, James and John and led them up on a high mountain where the four of them were alone. Why just these three, we don't know, but there was no Philip or Andrew or Thomas, or Judas or anyone else, just Peter, James and John. As they were up on this mountain together, something odd happened. Jesus' face started shining like the sun and his clothes became "dazzling white" as it says in the NRSV, or his clothes became "as white as light" as another translation says. Out of the blue, Moses and Elijah also appeared there with Jesus and they were talking with him. Peter finally spoke and he said "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." But while Peter was still talking suddenly a bright cloud came over them, and from the cloud there was a voice which said "This is my Son, the Beloved, with him I am well pleased, listen to him." The three disciples were frightened by this voice as I feel sure I would be too, and they fell to the ground, trembling. But they then felt Jesus touch them and say "Get up and don't be afraid." And at that time the disciples noticed that Moses and Elijah were gone. No one was left except Jesus. And then as they were coming down the mountain, out of this strange scene, something even stranger happened. Jesus said to the three disciples "Tell no one about this, until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead. Say nothing about this, until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.

Now, if you find all this a little confusing this morning, I want to tell you that you are not alone. Your pastor also finds it confusing. Why are the disciples told not to tell anyone about this, what's the big secret? We can guess why Jesus says this, and maybe some good reasons

for saying this come to mind. Maybe Jesus thought that people would misunderstand this event if they didn't first know about the resurrection. Maybe he thought that this story would somehow be a distraction for people as he was headed to the cross. Maybe he thought if people knew about it something would happen to him that would interfere with his plans to go to the cross. We just don't know. But for whatever reason Jesus says tell no one until after I have been raised from the dead. Keep this a secret until after I have been raised from the dead.

I know of a couple named Becca and Rodney. Becca and Rodney were dating for a long time and they finally got engaged, and once they were engaged Becca let Rodney in on a terrible secret she had been hiding. She had the eating disorder bulimia and she had had it for years. She'd had it ever since she was a teenager when she worried about her body image. As a bulimic Becca would eat like a normal person but then she would go into the bathroom and throw up in order to avoid gaining any weight. Becca saw a doctor about her problem and it was not so severe that her health was in danger but it was something that she still struggled with. For years she had avoided telling Rodney about this because she worried that he would stop loving her if he knew or even look at her differently. But now she trusted him enough to let him in on her secret, feeling that she knew Rodney well enough now that he would not hurt her. Well, it so happened that Rodney had a cousin who was also bulimic. His cousin had also been ashamed to tell anyone her secret but she finally got the courage to come forward and tell her church and even join a support group and she found great healing in that. Once she shared her story, Rodney's cousin was amazed at how many people surrounded her with love and who even told her that they had the same disorder, people she would never imagine telling her that they had this disorder. Well, Rodney thought Becca would find the same healing in

coming forward. So one day Becca got a phone call, a stranger's voice was on the other end, and it was a counselor who led a group therapy session about eating disorders who thought she might be interested in coming in. Becca was crushed. Rodney tried to explain to her that he was just trying to help Becca by telling her secret, but he didn't seem to understand that in Becca's mind, it wasn't his secret to tell. Becca's trust in Rodney was shattered. And his betrayal of her would end their relationship.

No matter who you are in life, you eventually come to a point where there is something in your life that you don't want everyone to know about. In fact, there may be something in your life that you don't want anyone to know about, but if you are fortunate enough to have a friend, or someone to love, you may have someone in your life that you trust enough to let them in on your secret. And that is a sacred trust. And part of being a friend or a fiancé or a spouse is knowing just what a sacred thing you have been entrusted with, when you've been entrusted with such a secret. And here's the thing, as the person who has been entrusted with this secret, you may believe the person you care about will be better off if they share this information with a lot of people. In fact you may even know they will be better off. But to be a friend is to know that even your friend would be better off if they shared their secret, for you to share it for them would mean you are no longer a friend. Or you may be a fiancé or a spouse to the person you care about, but if you would share their secret for any reason, you aren't a faithful fiancé or a faithful spouse.

For most of my life I have grown up believing that everything about the gospel of Jesus Christ should be proclaimed as loudly as possible to as many people as possible. I remember when I was a teenager, my friend Chris who was a Southern Baptist would often take me as a

guest to his Baptist youth group that met every week. I liked the Baptist youth group. I liked them a lot. They had all the cookies you could eat and all the lemonade you could drink. But every week as we sat around in a circle, they wanted to know how many people you witnessed to this week. That is, how many people did you tell about Jesus. They would always start with Shirley Mae Blackburn. And Shirley Mae would always have some astronomical number of people she told about Jesus like twelve or thirteen people. And then they would always get around to me and I would say zero. Same as last week, this week I told exactly zero people about Jesus. Well, in spite of the cookies and lemonade after doing that for a few weeks, I got a little tired of going to the Baptist youth group and I decided I would stick with the Presbyterian youth who didn't care so much how many people I told about Jesus, although I'm not sure that's a good thing. But all my life, I have been told that the things we learn about God are the things we ought to be out proclaiming. The last thing Jesus said to his disciples in the gospel of Matthew is go into all the world, go into all the world, baptizing people in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. That is the way it should be for the most part. As we know from hearing terrible stories about sexual abuse in the church, secrets in the church can be dangerous. Priests and Pastors who have been looked at as speaking for God have turned to adults and children they have abused and said don't tell anyone about this, this is our secret. So let me give you two quick rules about secrets. First, no one who in the clergy should ever ask a parishioner that they are serving to keep a secret. And second, no one who has ever harmed you ever has a right to ask you to keep your harm a secret. But that aside, if you have ever had wounds or scars or shame that you don't want the whole world to know about, if you have ever had something about

yourself that you did not want the world to know about, isn't it good to know that sometimes God is the same way. I don't know why that helps so much, but I think it does. If you have ever suffered there is something healing about knowing that God too has suffered. If you have ever been lonely or rejected there is something healing in knowing that God too has been lonely and rejected. And if you have ever had a secret, if you have ever had something in your life that you didn't want the world to know for whatever reason, then for whatever reason, and for reasons maybe we can't fully understand, God has secrets, too. And that is the story of the transfiguration.