

From The Rector's Study, the Rev. Bryce Sangster
Sunday, September 5th, Pentecost XV, Why the big secret?
Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23, Psalm 125, James 2:1-10, 14-17, Mark 7:24-37

Why the big secret? There are two reasons, one in each of the two parts of the Gospel today;

Jesus is going away to the region of Tyre so that he can rest and not have the crowds of people following him. He doesn't want people to know where he is so he can have a day off. Unfortunately the Syrophenician woman has other ideas, and has some realization about who Jesus is. She then engages with Jesus in a creative way, responding to his comment about not taking the food from the children and giving it to dogs, by saying that you don't begrudge the dogs for eating the crumbs that fall from the children's table.

Herbert O'Driscoll has said that she was able to show Jesus that his ministry went beyond the children of Israel to include all in the world. She both got what she came for, and showed Jesus the extent of his ministry, beyond his original thoughts. She was willing to accept an insult from Jesus, calling her and her daughter dogs, and instead of responding with anger and indignation and saying something like; Even if you offered now, I wouldn't accept, she convinces Jesus to see the bigger picture for him and she gets what she came for.

So Jesus couldn't keep his identity a secret. And the second secret, about the healing of the deaf man he could not keep secret, although he tried. But why was he trying? Perhaps because he doesn't want the whole of his message to be lost. He doesn't want people just to see the healing of the deaf man and others as the whole of his ministry and why he came.

So what is the rest of the message? Both Proverbs and James talk about treatment of the poor and that we have a part to play in the living out of the gospel message. This may be summarized by the last verse in James today; *so faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.*

So what Jesus is concerned about, and to some extent has been realized, is that there is a temptation and an allowance to have faith without works, to just receive what God has to offer without any real and supportive response. We are called to follow Jesus, not just receive the blessings he is offering us in the Spirit. We are encouraged to pass on the blessings to others particularly those most in need.

But didn't Jesus realize that human nature as it is, the more you tell people not to say anything, the more this will be talked about? Maybe this is true, but in essence there is no wrong reason to begin a relationship with God. Just look at Peter, and after denying him, three times, Jesus still asks him to feed his sheep three times. So Jesus would have wanted both secrets kept, but if not, there was still a benefit for his message to get out, regardless of how tired he was or how people understood his message as a starting point.

Our relationship and spiritual journey continues,

Amen.