

Message: “Who Am I?”

Do you remember the first time you were asked to keep a secret?

I do. I moved to Huntsville, Alabama for a new job, working for a defense contractor. My job required security clearance, which took quite a bit of time and effort to obtain. As soon as it came through, my boss sat me down and said, “I’m going to tell you your first secret.”

I couldn’t imagine what it might be. It felt like an important moment. I felt trusted. I nodded, sat quietly and waited. My boss looked around, leaned forward and said, “Seven.” That was it. Seven what?

This was my first lesson into the nature of secrets. If you don’t know the context, the information is meaningless. Once you put the two together, what was hidden is now revealed.

Why am I talking about secrets? In verse 20 in our reading, Matthew 16:13-20, Jesus tells the disciples to keep what was revealed secret. He doesn’t want them to tell anyone about the valuable knowledge they now have. To understand why, it’s helpful to know a bit about secrets.

Jesus isn’t trying to be deceptive or to harm anyone. In this case, Jesus is empowering his disciples. Jesus is trusting them, which is a sign he’s taking their relationship to a deeper level. Jesus understands the nature of secrets. The saying, “*Tell your secret to the wind, but don't blame it for telling the trees,*”¹ would be as true then as it is today.

Jesus trusts his disciples. The group has been together for years. They’ve witnessed amazing, supernatural events, like the feeding of thousands of people, Jesus’ walking on water and calming the sea, miraculous healing and more.

And Jesus has been teaching and mentoring his disciples, modeling the way of life he wants them to live and teach others to follow.

But, outside of this extended group of disciples, there are a lot of people who are more interested in the show; the miraculous signs, the way Jesus challenges authorities, and the reputation he has. These people are more focused on form over substance, or, as the lesson from

¹ <https://bookroo.com/quotes/secrets>

last week taught us, external appearance and actions rather than what lies on the inside, the inner person, the heart.

Jesus doesn't want to add fuel to this flame of temptation. So, he asks the disciples to keep a secret. But Jesus also asks the disciples to keep the valuable thing secret until it's time for it to be fully revealed. Jesus doesn't want the disciples to feel ashamed for keeping a secret, or to ruminate over it, causing them harm. Jesus is inviting the disciples into the power of the mystery.

This leads us to a simple question:

What's so valuable that it must be kept secret?

Maybe we need to be more specific. It's like having a specific key which only fits a certain lock. Only once the two are joined is the treasure available for all to see.

What's the key and which lock does it fit? I don't want to stretch the analogy too far, but it seems to me Jesus himself tells us what, or who, the key is. I think the key is the Holy Spirit, who is God's power manifest. God's Spirit makes what was unknown, known. When God's Spirit opens our hearts and minds, we are ready to know God.

Then the lock must be God's kingdom. What was invisible, God's presence on Earth, is unveiled for all to see. Jesus said, "*Now is the time! Here comes God's kingdom! Change your hearts and lives and trust this good news!*" (Mark 1:15). The treasure hidden in plain sight is revealed for the disciples – now and then, to take in.

What's revealed? The treasure is Jesus. The Holy Spirit reveals to Peter and the disciples the true identity of Jesus. He is the Christ, the Savior who will save us from our sins. Jesus is God incarnate, God present on Earth in body and spirit. Jesus is the one who opens the way to heaven for us, inviting us into covenant relationship with God.

Jesus invites the disciples into this God-moment. He has the authority to do so. And dear, bold Peter is spiritually open and awake enough to receive the gift, the answer to all their prayers. Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah, promised by God for millennia. God no longer seems distant. And God will no longer be quiet. God is not dead.

Christ is evidence God is alive. And in Jesus, God is a living being, sitting with the disciples and sharing this gift with them – and with us. Don't miss this occasion in your life. You, too, are invited into the kingdom of God. Jesus forgives you and, by grace, reconnects you to God. All you need to do is be willing to change your life, trust in the Spirit and believe. When you do, what was hidden is revealed. What was limited and bound – your soul, is now free and connected to the source of real life - God. And your life will change for the better.

It's easy to miss the gravity of the moment. We've heard the story. We know how it ends. Even if you don't read the Bible, there are plenty of movies, songs and people talking about Jesus, his birth, life and death. Most people are curious, but unless invited or prompted in some way, may not go any further. This is sad to me, as so many of our neighbors miss out on all that comes with knowing Jesus for who, and what, he is. Even those in the church can become desensitized to the majesty of what is revealed by God's Spirit on that day long ago.

Matthew's been leading us to this God-moment, this revelation.

He's carefully crafted a narrative, leaving breadcrumbs for us to follow along the path, from Jesus' birth to his baptism and his journey as he prepares the disciples for what is to come. The disciples weren't ready to declare Jesus is the Messiah to the world. They recognize Jesus is the Messiah, but they don't understand the full implication – yet. This is why Jesus asks for their silence. He wants to save them from being the target of rejection by other people. That's Jesus' burden to bear.

Jesus is clear about his identity. He asks the disciples “Who am I?” because he knows two answers are given. The answer of people in general is positive. Jesus is a prophet. Today, people see Jesus as a good teacher or even one who shows a way of God.

But this answer is inadequate. It's a view limited to the humanity of Jesus. It completely misses the divine majesty and gift of Jesus as Messiah. Peter, speaking on behalf of the disciples, confesses, “*You are the Christ, Son of the living God*” (v16). And the world changed, forever. The church is built on this foundation. And no force of evil will ever be able to tear it down or stand against it.

Jesus was, is and always will be our Redeemer, the One who saves us from ourselves, and the evil and injustice of this world. Once we are his, we are no longer part of this world. We are part of the next, God's kingdom.

Why does this matter to us? Once we accept Jesus for who, and what, he is, the Messiah, we gain a new identity. Our identity fundamentally changes when we accept Jesus' grace and love. We are spiritually reborn. We are adopted into the divine family. Our mind is transformed (Romans 12:1-3), and our heart is made new (Ezekiel 36:26).

Our old ways of living, the unhealthy, unspiritual patterns of our life become less satisfying. We find ourselves unlearning bad habits and learning new, good habits, spiritual practices and ways of being and living based on love and grace. We find new meaning, passion, hope and joy in life, here and now, both in the good times and in the bad. We become a new person, from the inside-out, when we trust and accept Christ's love.

And we, like the disciples, begin to pay it forward, one small step at a time each day as we're commissioned and sent forth as disciples who make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20). We care for others, teach, preach, baptize, and commune with the Lord when we gather at the table. And we look forward to the day when we'll be united with our family and friends, all who have gone before us, at the heavenly table, feasting with the Lord.

I ask you here and now: Who are you?

I pray you answer with me, **soy un hijo de Deu**. I am a child of God.

Amen.

Let us pray ...

Matthew 16:13-20 (CEB)

Now when Jesus came to the area of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Human One is?”

They replied, “Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the other prophets.”

He said, “And what about you? Who do you say that I am?”

Simon Peter said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Then Jesus replied, “Happy are you, Simon son of Jonah, because no human has shown this to you. Rather my Father who is in heaven has shown you. I tell you that you are Peter. And I’ll build my church on this rock. The gates of the underworld won’t be able to stand against it. I’ll give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Anything you fasten on earth will be fastened in heaven. Anything you loosen on earth will be loosened in heaven.” Then he ordered the disciples not to tell anybody that he was the Christ.