

This week climaxes with Ground Hog Day. It isn't a holy day but gets a lot of attention. As a kid, it was always a big deal in school, and I have no clue why.

We have been told if these sleepy, darkness dwellers see their shadow they will go back into hiding and winter will last six more weeks! (Of course, that makes no difference in Michigan where we have at least at least two more months of winter if not more!)

Consider this issue of hiding from the light as you reflect on the Gospel from Mark. Think of what it means to hide from the light of God's son! Mark said that the congregation listening to Jesus were rendered speechless by the power of his teaching! They wondered, "who is this teacher who finally explains scripture, so it makes sense? But then they were distracted from such awe by the intrusion of reality as a man broke into convulsions and shouted terrible words.

We know his words weren't really his, but some sort of evil spirits controlling his body, who cried out, "I know who you are! And I know what you are here to do!" And just as suddenly Jesus silenced the voice, told the evil spirits not to talk about this miracle, and then set the man free.

Now of all that was going on, why do you think Jesus chose to command the evil spirits to keep his identity secret? Why did he want to hide who he was? What was the problem? Does this make any sense at all?

First, think about how so many people go out of their way to keep their identities secret. For instance, think about a spy, who is trying to steal secrets without being caught. Consider all masked crusaders from the Lone Ranger to Spiderman who had to conceal their identity for self-protection? Maybe sometimes it is important to stay in the shadows.

But this doesn't didn't make sense for Jesus. He was on a roll! His followers were excited by his teaching and even more energized as they saw him perform an exorcism! An imprisoned man was able to resume a normal life! Wow!!!

Then Jesus' words shattered the buzz of the crowd and the anger of the evil spirits. "Be silent!" But why that command? Was it simply reverse psychology? Like little children who can't keep a secret did he think if he told them not to say anything it would make them even more likely to do so?

But there is something more going on. Think of it this way; would you invite a terrorist to teach U.S. history to your fifth grader? Would you ask a stranger to explain the extent of your love for a spouse or your children? Why then, would Jesus allow his enemies a platform to define his nature and purpose?

Mark uses this moment to impress a major theme of Jesus' ministry which is simply, until one sees the cross and empty tomb no one could clearly understand who Jesus the teacher, miracle worker, and all-around good guy really was! Until Easter, there would be no way to understand the miracle of Christmas or the mission of our Messiah!

Jesus' goal was not great stories or miracles, but something bigger and he needed everyone to be quiet until they had something bigger to share.

What irony! In Jesus' day everyone wanted to share their version of Messiah and had to wait. In our day, we know the whole truth and too often are the ones keeping silent! Jesus wrestled to silence evil and we, who have been set free, too often stand mute as if we don't know what to say!

Think of all the meaningless stuff that people can't wait to share on Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter. Yet, too often we act as if we must keep secret our faith. We are comfortable celebrating and sharing our faith in worship, but like masked crusaders, when we get out in the daylight, we often are afraid to reveal our true identity. Like groundhogs afraid of our own shadow, we sometimes scurry back into comfortable routines while the cold winds of winter continue to blow into lives around us. We have the Light and don't carry it into the Dark.

When Jesus gave people the miracle they wanted, they brought their friends and packed the arena. But when Jesus arrived at the cross to show his victorious purpose, everyone ran and hid.

Often our discipleship is often no different than someone who makes a show of giving God glory in a moment of success but might not ever do so at other moments in their living. If God is to be glorified, is that not appropriate in every moment of life?

The Gospel is not a secret, and we are not masked crusaders. Church buildings are not hiding places but a venue where we gather to glorify God and be strengthened for life in the world. A disciple is not one who seeks special favors, but who responds to grace with daily, servant love!

Jesus asked his follower to wait until they saw the whole picture to talk. And he wanted to be in control of the message, not his opponents. In our recent election wasn't the strategy to use misleading ads, incomplete information, and half-truths to damage an opponent? That was Jesus' concern. Until the world understood He came not to create paradise on earth, but to lift us from earth to a heavenly home the message would have been incomplete and misleading.

But after Easter, everything changed! And silence is never an option for people whose lives have been restored as a gift. We are blessed to be a blessing. We are gathered to be sent. We are loved to share love.

When people are with you, what do they hear? What do they see? What do they feel? If you are Christ's, let his identity define yours today and tomorrow! The time to be timid or hide our true identity is long gone.

More than ever the world needs to hear and see a hope fueled love that is stronger than the evil spirits' voices of anger, hatred, separation, selfishness and lack of love for God or neighbor!

Our beagle is afraid of every sudden noise, and sometimes even us. We don't know what happened in his past, but our goal is to bring him out of that shadow and into the light of a different day. Is that any different than what Jesus has done for us? Or what our call is to the world around us. Drawn to the Light we are called to bask in the light and share the light.

Some of you remember old TV shows like "What's My Line?" and "I've got a Secret." Panelists tried to guess who the mystery guest was, or what they did. Today's shows are the masked singer and masked dancer where similar hiding identities is the name of the game.

We don't want to go down that road with our lives of faith! Why hide what is so important or refuse to share such a powerful gift?

There is no reason ever again to fear the shadows. There is no reason to allow the world's sinfulness or darkness to define or speak for us. There is no reason to be afraid to admit who we are or share what we know. Christ has come to bring good news to the nations, and we are given the privilege of helping. There is no good reason for such love to ever be hidden in the shadows again.

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