

St. Andrew’s Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Mark 7:31-37

“It Shouldn’t Be a Secret”

In today’s Holy Gospel – Jesus heals a man and then asks everyone there to keep it a secret, and those who saw it go right out and tell everyone, in spite of Jesus’ asking them otherwise? Why? Well, Jesus was in the land of the Gentiles – on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee – in the region of the Decapolis – ten pagan cities.

Jesus was no stranger to this region, He had been here before – He had healed Legion here – sending the demons into the swine, the pigs and into the lake. Remember that Jews don’t raise pigs – they consider them unclean. Jesus, being in this region, did not want those who were in power at the Temple to make a huge issue out of this. Jesus healed someone who was not a Jewish believer, who was deaf and could hardly speak, and they would surely be declaring this to be an abomination and then they would call Jesus unclean – for even touching a Gentile! Jesus put His fingers in the man’s ears, and then spit and touched the man’s tongue. That was a double whammy! This miraculous change was amazing and the man began to speak.

The Prophet Isaiah foretold such miracles in verses 35:5-6, which you heard read this morning, which says *"Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy."* This was clearly pointing to the great healing that would happen when Jesus was finally revealed as Messiah to the whole world. I believe that when Jesus comes again - everyone will recognize Him and praise Him as the anointed One of God, the Messiah, the Christ. It will be the choice of those people to recognize Him, or not – and you know where each will go. It is simple. There is one way to live – with Christ, and there is another - without Christ. Here this all takes place on the Gentile side or eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, among the ten large pagan cities.

The Galilee region is in the extreme northern part of Israel and at the heart of it is the Sea of Galilee. This freshwater lake is fed by one body of water - the Jordan River, bringing it water from the melting mountain snow peaks. Isaiah in 9:1 referred to this region as the ‘Galilee of the Gentiles’ because much of the trade from the far east to the west came through this area. Its location was prime because of the crossroads called the “Via Maris” or the “way to the sea” that connected the east with the ten cities, the Decapolis, and then through Capernaum and on to the Mediterranean. Remnants of that roadway are visible even today. It goes by Megiddo and the Jezreel Valley.

Jesus did the greater part of His earthly ministry in this Galilee region, and it was available to both Jew and Gentile: He preached the Sermon on the Mount – overlooking the Sea of Galilee, He fed the 5,000 men and their families, He fed the 4,000 men and their families, Jesus performed so many of His miracles here. It was on a mountain in the Galilee region that the risen Jesus gave His disciples the Great Commission, from Matthew chapter 28, – to bring the Gospel to the whole world – telling the world filled with Jews and Gentiles about Him. Jesus’ ministry in the Galilee fulfilled what God had foretold through His Prophet Isaiah, seven

hundred years earlier. In Isaiah 9:1-2 God said a “great light” would shine in the Galilee after the arrival of the Messiah, and He predicted in Isaiah 49:6 *“I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.”* God fulfilled these promises *“that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles.”* (Acts 26:23).

One of my very favorite verses of the New Testament comes from the first chapter of the Book of Acts, verse 8. The Resurrected Jesus is just about to ascend to the Father on the Mount of Olives, and He instructs His disciples that they are to be His witnesses – *“in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth!”* A witness sees something and goes to court and tells what they saw, what they heard, and what they know. That is exactly what Jesus is asking us to do. That means everywhere! *“Even to the ends of the earth.”* This invitation is NOT exclusive! It is not just for Saint Andrew’s Anglican Church or for the church next door, or any of the other Christian Churches. It is up to the hearer to accept Jesus or not. It is comforting to know that all Gentile believers are “grafted in” to the family of Abraham, and so adopted as heirs of the Kingdom of God. This morning, Marilyn is teaching the youngsters about ‘grafted in.’ Romans 11:17 says that we are *“grafted in.”*



This symbol is of the menorah with then goes into the star of David, and then to the ‘Ichthus’ or fish symbol – like you might find on the back of Christian’s cars. We are grafted into the menorah, to the star of David and then to the Christian symbol. Like grafting fruit trees – to make them special or bigger. God has grafted us into the family of Abraham – the root of Jesse (David’s father.)

As members of the Body of Christ, we are called, commissioned, charged, and we are chosen for the job of sharing the “Good News” of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. I want to share with you a Greek word that is all throughout the New Testament. The word **“εὐαγγέλιον”** “you-ah-gelyon” means Gospel or good news. And that is just what we are called to share – to be a witness. How often do we tell people, “hey do want to hear what my son did?” (or my daughter?) What they did, what my grandchildren did, while you are witnessing to an amazing event in their lives. We tell people about our friends. Let’s say, for example, that there is a group of people who are going to France in a few days, and they are going to have a great

time – and when they come back they are going to witness to us about the pictures and the stories that they had. Jim and Barbara went out west this summer and they shared with me to be a member of their group – their great adventure. I saw places in this country that I didn’t even know existed. They witnessed about their travels and the glory of God that they saw in these places. That is what we are called to do. If we can tell people about things like that – why can’t we tell people about our best friend – the One who saved us from sin and death? You are here this morning because Jesus is your best friend, and you want your children and grandchildren to know about Jesus. What a blessing! I had a visit this week from Elizabeth. She came in and sat down in my office and we chatted in English and Spanish. What a witness she is – hola Elizabeth! She witnessed to me about things that she has learned. She said, “God bless you” and then “in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. That young lady has been taught by Jennifer and Eric and Grand-Daddy and Grandma about who Jesus is and what He means to her, and she shows it when she talks. That is being a witness for Jesus!

God had been speaking through His prophets for hundreds of years to declare that this was going to happen, and when the Jewish people rejected Jesus as the Messiah then the Gospel would be preached to the Gentiles. I don’t know about you – but we Gentiles are very happy that this happened. I want to remind you of the words of the old man Simeon, as he held the baby Jesus in his arms on the day of His circumcision, the naming ceremony in the Temple. Simeon said, *“For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”* (Luke 2:30-32) He was not being exclusive – but he was talking inclusively. It was God’s plan all along that the world would receive the Words of His Savior – not just the Jews. Then there are the words of the Apostle Paul who wrote in Romans 1:16, and I want you to really take this to heart: *“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.”* Every day we should be looking for opportunities to share what Jesus has done in our lives, whether it is sitting down and saying ‘hola’, sharing what your children or grandchildren have been doing, or it could be online, or a travelogue about a trip to the western part of this country. Every day we should be looking for opportunities to share who Jesus is – and what He has done in our lives, and then let folks experience His love firsthand. Brothers and sisters in Christ, it should never, ever be a secret again.