

Sixteenth Sunday After Pentecost, September 9, 2018, Liturgical Year "B"

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Mark 7:31-37

"It is No Secret Anymore"

In today's Holy Gospel – Jesus heals a man and then asks everyone there to keep it a secret. Could you imagine witnessing such an amazing event and then told – "but don't tell anybody"? It's like going to a Georgia game and something great happens: "don't tell anybody!" Or to see the Trojans trounce their opponents Friday night: "don't tell anybody!" Jesus heals a man who cannot hear or speak – and those who saw it go right out and tell everyone, in spite of Jesus asking them otherwise? There is a point to all this.

In order to understand why Jesus asked them to keep it a secret was because of where this miracle happened, and who it happened to! Jesus was ministering to Gentiles on the Gentile side of the Lake. How do I know that? The key is the Decapolis – ten pagan cities on the eastern side of the Galilee – where the Gentiles lived. Jesus healed Legion – sending the demons into the swine, the pigs and into the lake. Jews don't raise pigs – this was the other side of the lake – where they had the good ribs! Those who were in power at the Temple would have made a huge issue out of this, Jesus healed someone who was not a Jewish believer, and they would be declaring this to be an abomination and then they would call Jesus unclean – by touching a Gentile!

God had been speaking through His prophets 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 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) 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 *"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."*

What took place that day on the "Gentile side of the Lake" showed Jesus purposely stepping into the world of the non-Jew and then He took this Gentile man, as the Gospel says, *"away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means, "Be opened!"). At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened, and he began to speak plainly."* (Mark 7:33-35) Isaiah foretold such miracles in verses 35:5-6, which you heard read this morning, which say *"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 will happen when Jesus is 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

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of those people to recognize Him, or you know where they will go. It is simple. There is one way to live – with Christ, and there is another - without Christ. Isn't it interesting that this all takes place on the Gentile side or eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, among the ten large pagan cities.

Let me paint you a picture about the importance of the Galilee being a gateway to the Gentiles. I have a painting in my office taken from a picture on the Sea of Galilee. It is Magaan Holiday Village where I stayed twice. Just to the left of where that picture is – I married a young couple by the Sea of Galilee. 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. As it is coming in – this one body of water becomes the drinking water for ALL of Israel, even today, comes from the Sea of Galilee. Isaiah in 9:1 referred to this region as the Galilee of the Gentiles because much of the trade from the east (the far east) to the west came through this area. Its location was prime because of the cross roads 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.

Jesus did the greater part of His ministry in this Galilee region, and it was available to both Jew and Gentile:

- it was here that He preached the Sermon on the Mount – overlooking the Sea of Galilee,
- it was here that He fed the 5,000 men and their families,
- it was here that He fed the 4,000 men and their families,
- it was here that Peter professed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God at Caesarea Philippi,
- it was here that Jesus performed so many of His miracles, including the woman with the bleeding issue – who just wanted to touch the hem of Jesus' garment, on His way to bring Jairus' daughter back to life.
- 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 predicted 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).

Please open your Pew Bibles to a very important passage – spoken by the Apostle Peter, that was recorded in Act 10. Let's turn to page 1709 to verse 36. *"You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee*

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after the baptism that John preached-- how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how He went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with Him. We are witnesses of everything He did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed Him by hanging Him on a cross, but God raised Him from the dead on the third day and caused Him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen--by us who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that He is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about Him that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name. While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles." (Acts 10:36-46)

One of my very favorite verses of the Bible 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 the disciples that they are to be His witnesses – “*in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth!*” What is a witness? You see an accident and you say, “I will be a witness.” A witness 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.*” The invitation is NOT exclusive! It is not just for Saint Andrew’s Anglican Church or for those who are celebrating the 125th anniversary of First Baptist, next door. It is up to the hearer to accept Jesus or not. Gentile believers are “grafted in” to the family of Abraham, and so adopted as heirs of the Kingdom of God. Romans 11:17 says that we are “*grafted in.*”

Since Jesus’ Words are no longer a secret – then we as members of the Body of Christ are called, we are commissioned, we are charged, we are chosen with the job of sharing the “Good News” of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Those who attended our Confirmation class yesterday got a Greek lesson as they learned some words that are important as they learn what it is to be an Anglican. Here is a free little Greek lesson – a word that is all throughout the New Testament. The word “**εὐαγγέλιον**” “you-ah-gelyon” means Gospel or good news. The Good News is what we are called to share. How often do we tell people, as witness, “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. There is a group of people who are going to France in a few day, 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. 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 He is your best friend, and you want your children and grandchildren to know about Jesus.

Remember the words that I read earlier from Romans 1:16 “*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,*

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then for the Gentile.” Every day we should be looking for opportunities to share what Jesus has done in our lives – and let them experience His love first hand. It should never, ever be a secret again. It truly is no secret anymore!