

Secret Identity

Luke 9: 28--36

I'd like to play a little word association game with you today. I'm going to say a few names and you tell me who comes to mind. Ready? Clark Kent. Peter Parker. Bruce Wayne. Barry Allen. OK. Your comic book literacy is where it should be. One feature of superhero stories is the idea of a secret identity. The concept creates all kinds of dramatic tension; "What happens if the true identity of the super hero is revealed?" Once in a while the mask is pulled back and somebody discovers the truth.

Would you believe something like that is going on in our Gospel Lesson today? The mountaintop experience recorded there is the brief exposure of Jesus' secret identity. We call this Jesus' transfiguration, meaning his figure or appearance changed. In front of his closest friends, Jesus peels back the human mask and lets them see who He really is. Luke writes that the appearance of Jesus' face changed and his clothes were as bright as a flash of lightning! The secret identity is revealed. Jesus, who looks like just another guy from Galilee, is God.

What do you do with information like that? What do you do when you find out that the rabbi you've been hanging out with has the full glory of the Almighty God hidden inside Him? What do you do when you discover that he can hold conversations with Moses and Elijah? How do you handle the voice of the Almighty One saying: "This is my beloved Son—Listen to Him!" Well, you'd probably do just that—you would listen to Jesus. You would hang on every word he said. And then you might start to wonder, if he can do that, what else is he capable of?

But the moment things seem normal again, Jesus asks you not to talk about it. (We get that from Mark's gospel.) Jesus doesn't mean forget about it. How could you? He wants you to remember. One day it will make perfect sense. But He's concerned. He knows what people will do if the word gets out that he has super-heroic power. But he did not come to leap tall buildings in a single bound, nor did he come to shatter the shields of the Roman Empire. He came for the cross. He came to stagger up the hill of the Skull. This superhero's power is made perfect in weakness. With strength that defies description, he will lie down on the wooden beams and allow the nails to enter his flesh. His heart will stop beating. Only then will sin be cancelled, paid for in full. Only then will it be clear what the super-power of Jesus is. It is the power of sacrifice. It is the power of mercy. It is the power of "Father forgive them." It is the power of love for the undeserving.

And then He would live again. Not in some spiritualized sort of "He'll live on in our hearts

forever” type of thing, but he would really live again, physically, resurrected, walking around, eating, breathing, teaching. There, too, is the power of God. Death is defeated. Its stranglehold is broken. Jesus will share resurrected life with all who believe in Him.

Jesus had His cross and tomb in mind when he told Peter, James, and John not to say anything about his transfiguration. His secret identity would be revealed to the whole world, all in due time. But for now, his path led to Jerusalem. Luke says that's exactly what Jesus was talking about with Moses and Elijah. His work of saving you and me from the horror of disconnection from God was not complete until cross and tomb were dealt with. And dealt with them He did, using his super-powers of sacrifice and resurrection to come and into your life with rescue.

With all this talk about secret identities, we can't leave today without wrestling with this question. Is your Christian life with Jesus a secret identity that you keep under wraps? Is there a part of you that hopes that your friends and acquaintances never discover your link to Jesus? If you've struggled with this, you're not alone. Selfishly, we know it's easier to hide the light of Jesus under a bushel basket. Society would have us keep our faith private. But that's simply not what Jesus would have you do.

Jesus will not let you make Him your little secret. It isn't possible. Because if Jesus is alive in you, He's going to cause you to look for someone to help. He's going to cause you to look for someone to serve. He's going to cause you to come alongside someone with words of hope and kind actions. That's just the way He is. Sure, you can decide to not go along with it. You can try to put the lid on His compassion. That's why you and I need the call to repent, to turn, to receive forgiveness, to recommit to God's claim on your life and mine. Scripture says you have been given a Spirit of power and love and good judgment. You are free to let your true identity—your connected-to-Christ-identity—shine through every day of our life. There is no law against it, no restrictions. Just reach for it in faith.

God wants this to be your reality. He wants to give you Himself. But you have to know where to look. The same God who hid his full glory in a normal-looking rabbi from Nazareth still hides Himself today. He hides himself in words on a page; words that are sung; words that are preached; words that are discovered in Holy Scripture. Every time you hear those words it is God speaking to your heart and mind. That means putting yourself in a position to hear those words is crucial.

He hides himself in ordinary water; water scooped out of a bowl. Every time that water is accompanied by God's Name, it is God Himself cleansing a person and gifting them with His

life.

He also hides himself in wafers and wine. When this food is combined with Jesus' words, you take the broken body and shed blood of your Savior into yourself. He literally pours Himself into you, sharing His identity with you. What is that identity? Because of Jesus, you are someone God the Father points to and says, "This is my beloved child. I am fully pleased with you."