
Stories of Solidarity :: Don't Tell Anyone

by michael j. kimpan

Jesus and the Twelve had made the 25 mile trek off the shores of the Sea of Galilee, and stopped to rest outside the district of Caesarea. They sat along the fallen rocks on the side of the dust-filled road, their cloaks musty with the mixture of sweat and sand of travel.

Amidst their discussion and reminiscing of the miraculous discovery of the bushelfuls filled with bread to feed the crowds in previous towns, hunger had crept in. Luckily for them, the Sons of Zebedee had purchased an ample supply of figs for the journey.

Sitting in a circle under the nearly setting sun, they ate and laughed together.

Jesus, always one to turn the discussion toward something significant, asked his disciples :

'Who do people say I am?'

A myriad of responses flowed from their lips :

'Some say you're your cousin John the Baptist, come back from the dead.'

'Others claim you're Elijah, reincarnated.'

'Still others believe you're Jeremiah "the Weeping Prophet" - or perhaps one of the other prophets, come back from the grave!'

Jesus sat in silence as they considered the implications of their proclamations.

Many people had followed Jesus over these past three years. Thousands flocked to him wherever he went, and sat under his teachings. Some came to question, others seeking to find

answers to questions. Others, looking for a miracle. Still others seemed to come just to see what would happen while in the presence of this rebellious Rabbi.

Would Jesus set them straight?

*'But what about you...who do **you** say that I am?'*

Peter leaned forward, his mouth full of figs, and blurted out his suspicions ::

'You are the Anointed One! You're the Son of the living God, YHVH!'

The others leaned in as well, anticipating their Teacher to affirm Peter's proclamation.

'Don't tell anyone,' Jesus said nonchalantly.

<Yes, it's true : I skipped over the affirmation.>

Jesus does indeed affirm that he's the Messiah in this passage (according to the text), and claims he'll build his Church on the rock of Peter's declaration and states that even death will not overpower it.

He then gives his disciples the ability to 'bind' and 'loose' with the keys of the kingdom, a tremendous responsibility with which Christ's followers have yet to come to terms.

But then he warns them not to tell anyone he's the Messiah.

'Don't tell anyone.'

Is this odd to anyone else? In the context of western 21st century Evangelical circles, it seems Christians are *defined* by this proclamation - and don't do so secretly.

We make this declaration as a distinction between 'us' and 'them.'

And we do so not merely regarding Christ's claims of divinity - we pontificate about our opinion on a myriad of other issues as well - continually driving a wedge between those who believe as

we do, and those who don't.

We are a culture committed to conversion. Addicted to answers. Defined by distinction.

Church culture dictates declarations of 'Truth' (emphasized with a capital 't') so individuals *know what we believe* . We tragically live not as who we are called to be, but instead become borderline obsessed with correcting who we are not for fear of our being misunderstood.

But Jesus didn't seem to care.

It's not that he was unaware of who he was - nor did he shame Peter for his Spirit-guided insight into declaring his affirmation of Christ's claims of divinity. Yet it would seem it mattered less to Jesus what people believed *about him* than it did that they follow his teachings and experience his way of life.

Jesus seemed quite comfortable with many people following him, some for long periods of time, while simultaneously being uncertain as to these very claims of his divinity. Jesus didn't correct them or chastise them for not '*getting it*' - in fact, he told the disciples not to tell anyone once they themselves did!

Spending time with tax collectors and sex-workers and drunkards and other 'sinners' of his day, no doubt Jesus heard proclamations of *who he was* that missed the mark. Yet correcting those misconceptions was not nearly as important to him as doing life in proximity to and relationship with those who otherwise would not experience this abundant way of living.

In sharp contrast, I often find churches guilty of proclaiming preferred doctrinal positions while simultaneously lacking any compassionate or pastoral response to the very people they're pushing to the outside.

Any expressed doctrinal or theological position apart from a truly compassionate and pastoral response merely castrates the conversation.

Jesus seemed much more committed to the process - the conversation - the journey - the way - than his self-proclaimed followers seem to be. The obsession with cognitive conversion and admitted answers about Jesus renders our belief in him obsolete if they are not couched in external actions of loving one another in his example - standing in solidarity with the Other - even if, or when, they are mistaken.