

I want to start this sermon in a different way. Let's pretend that this is a sermon for young children. So concentrate for a minute on what it would take for you to become a child sitting in church. Now pretend that I'm asking you to come forward to sit in the front row. Imagine that I'm going to come down off this platform to stand right in front of you. If you're feeling especially creative this morning, you can even start squirming in your seat, maybe poking at the person next to you. OK, so are we all ready for the children's message? Here goes ...

*This morning's children's message is going to be a question that I hope you will try your very best to answer. Mary and Joseph named their baby "Jesus", but he had lots of other names given to him as well: Please raise your hand if you can think of one of those other names: Good Shepherd, Son of Man, Son of God (George, please sit still), Son of David, King of the Jews, Prince of Peace (Marilyn, please stop poking Luan), Counselor, Messiah, Prince of Peace, Christ. Very good, he had a lot of names. The name "Christ" is the most important one, it means that Jesus came from God, that people had been hoping and praying for a long time that God would send someone like him, and that Jesus would bring us all closer to God. Jesus is the Christ ... but I don't want you to mention the name "Christ" to anyone! Keep it to yourself. It's a secret! **Sssshhhh!** Let's all practice making the "**ssshhhh**" sound. If you tell anyone that Jesus is the Christ you will be in big trouble!*

Now that was our children's message. What did you think of it? Did it make sense to you? Would we really teach our children to keep quiet about Jesus Christ? But that's what happened to Peter in our reading from Mark's Gospel. "*Who do you think I am?*", Jesus asked Peter. "*You are the Christ, the Son of God*", Peter answered. There were all kinds of rumors and opinions about Jesus: "*he's a dangerous trouble-maker, he's a cheap faker, he's a bald-faced liar, he's completely crazy*", so when Peter shares his faithful insight that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah who will save Israel from all its enemies, it is a climactic moment in Mark's Gospel. Maybe Mark hopes that readers like us reading this story will be moved to shout "*Yes! Peter understands! And I do, too! Alleluia! Jesus is the Christ! Amen!*"

"*Who do you think I am?*" "*You are the Christ*". A wonderful, beautiful, insightful answer ... and then Jesus gives Peter strict orders not to tell anyone. **Sssshhhh!!!!** It's like being in an auto race at Watkins Glen - the green flag is waved, and the cars begin to accelerate quickly, but then the red flag suddenly comes out, before the cars even reach the first turn, and the race cars must come to a screeching halt.

And then the trackside announcer tells everyone to go home. **Sssshhhh!** So why does Jesus tell Peter to put the brakes on?

I'm glad that I'm a Presbyterian. I love how we take the Bible so seriously. I love how we discover the power of the Spirit in such amazing ways. I love the way that we encourage one another to put our faith into action. But one of the great tragedies of the Presbyterian Church is that we are much too silent. The world cries out for a Savior, but we keep too quiet. We are supposed to be an evangelical church, a church that is excited to tell the good news about Jesus Christ as the Lord and Savior of the world.

On the day that Jesus turned the water into wine at Cana he told Mary his mother to keep the miracle quiet, but that was practically the first day he got started, so you can imagine that he was a little cautious about his reputation. But this story with Peter is well along the road to Jerusalem. By this point Jesus has done lots of traveling and he's met lots of people, he's done lots of teaching and lots of miracles. It's very clear that Jesus is more than a good man, a good teacher, a healer - everything he does is bringing people closer to God than they've ever been before. Peter is one of the first to understand that Jesus is more than a good man, he is the Christ, the Messiah anointed by God to bring us all closer to heaven. Why the need to keep quiet about Jesus being the Christ?

It comes down to this. Peter and Jesus have different understandings of what the word "Christ" means. For Peter, the name "Christ" means victory, victory over the hated Roman conquerors, victory over the corrupt chief priests, victory over all who opposed Jesus. But for Jesus the name "Christ" means suffering and death. Peter is correct in naming Jesus the "Christ", but Peter doesn't yet know to end what this name will lead them. Peter is also correct in thinking that Jesus will achieve victory, but he doesn't understand the way that Jesus intends to reach that victory - not through weapons, or strength, but through sacrifice and suffering. Until he knows the whole meaning of Christ, Jesus wants Peter to keep quiet.

Recently, I've been worried about a serious "gap" in my preaching. I haven't been doing a very good job of describing and outlining the rewards of faith. If we turn to Christ we will enjoy an eternity of joy in heaven. The gap is that I haven't been doing a very good job of describing the joy of the heaven-bound. I think I do a good job of describing the things that are wrong in the world, but I haven't made as strong a case as I'd like for setting our hearts towards the joy of heaven.

But this story from Mark's Gospel forces me to reconsider. Peter was too quick to get to the rewards. He hadn't accurately assessed the risks, sacrifices, and dangers that we must face along the way.

“What are people saying about me, who do they think I am?”, Jesus asked his disciples that day. *“Some say you are John the Baptist returned from the dead”*, said one disciple. *“Others say you are Elijah or one of the other prophets”*, said another. *“But what about you, Jesus asked, who do you think I am?”* And Peter offered his answer.

Jesus asked Peter to keep it quiet for a time, but then there came the day when Jesus entered Jerusalem. It was Palm Sunday, and everyone was shouting for joy that the Christ had finally come into the world. I'm sure that Peter was one of the ones shouting the loudest. The Pharisees were annoyed. *“Tell your disciples to be quiet”*, they demanded of Jesus. Jesus answer: *“If these people are silenced the very stones will cry out.”* With our own voices lifted up today, in evangelical joy, let us affirm by our words, by our lives that Jesus is the Christ, the savior of the whole world.