

The Power of Secrets, II I Cor. 2:1-10; Rom. 16:25-26 9/22/19

Last Sunday we talked about the power of secrets in our lives. We noted the anxiety that keeping secrets can cause us, and the toxic effect keeping secrets can have on families and organizations. That truth cut close to home for some of us. But we were reminded that God is willing and able to help us deal with our secrets, that he always wants what is best for us. This week we're going to look at the other side of the coin- when secrets are positive.

Think about keeping the secret of a surprise party, for example. That can be a lot of fun for everyone! I remember as a kid, my mom tantalized us each year with clues about the gifts we would be receiving for a birthday or Christmas. That was another fun kind of secret. And a few years ago, our church received a nice bequest from a church member, who had kept his plans a secret from us! It was a very nice secret! Others of you should feel free to surprise us with a secret bequest of your own!

And then we come to God's secrets. You didn't know that God has secrets? Listen to these words from the Apostle Paul in his first letter to the church in Corinth, Greece. He talks about God's grand secret.

⁶Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. ⁷But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the

ages for our glory. ⁸None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ⁹But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him”— ¹⁰these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. (1 Cor. 2:6-10)

Here, Paul speaks about God’s secret wisdom, with its origins in eternity! He points out that this wisdom didn’t come from ordinary human beings, or even from the most powerful or smartest people on earth. (In general, the Bible is skeptical about the value of human wisdom, not discounting it entirely, but believing that our fallen nature renders our “wisdom” to be limited by both our finiteness- there is a awful lot we simply don’t know- and by our sin. Because of sin we often distort what we see and believe in order to justify ourselves.)

At any rate, Paul’s point is that this secret wisdom does not originate with us. Instead, this is God’s secret wisdom, a secret that has been concealed since the beginning of time, but has now been revealed. Think about that. Paul is saying that Adam and Eve and Abraham and Moses. The pharaohs of Egypt, Alexander the Great, Plato and Socrates all would have loved to know this secret of God, but they couldn’t; It was hidden. But, it has now been revealed- to us! That is a phenomenal claim. And

this secret is beyond anything we could even imagine. ⁹*But, as it is written, “... no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him”—* (I Cor. 2:9)

So, the next question, of course, is “What is this great secret?” Paul hints at it here, but he was more explicit a few verses earlier. *When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. ²For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.* (I Cor. 2:1-2) The mystery, the secret that God revealed through the Spirit is that salvation comes through Jesus Christ crucified. This is beyond anything anyone could have imagined or hoped for.

It means that salvation doesn't come through following all the details of the Jewish law, as the Pharisees tended to believe. The problem with salvation coming through law-keeping is that no one can keep the whole law! No one! It doesn't come through the tens of thousands of animal sacrifices that took place in ancient Israel every year. For there could never be enough of them to deal with the problem of sin in the human heart. It doesn't come from being a certain ethnicity- through being a descendant of Abraham, for example. That would automatically exclude most of the human race. It doesn't come through military action. Many in ancient Israel believed it would come by overthrowing Roman rule under

the military leadership of a Messiah. Nope. And, it doesn't come about through appeasing violent, capricious, insatiable gods, as the Greeks and Romans believed. People in those days believed that God's salvation would come in one of those ways, none of which was very hopeful.

What they never dreamed was that salvation would come through a man who suffered the most horrible and shameful death Rome had to offer, crucifixion. God was at work through the evil of that execution. Therefore, salvation comes about through an act of God, not through our own unreliable actions. God took on human flesh, lived perfectly as an example of how we all should live, and then offered himself as a sacrifice on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. In doing so he satisfied the all the requirements of the law for us. For all of us- Jews and Gentiles, religious people and so-called sinners, straight and gay, black and white and everything in between- Jesus satisfied all the demands of God's law for all of us, bringing salvation to all of us. This is extraordinarily Good News!

So what do we do? Our response is to simply accept and trust in the work Jesus did for us for the forgiveness of our sins. And then to live our lives in gratitude to God. That's it. That's what God requires of us. You give up trying to impress God with how good you are, and humbly accept his grace and forgiveness. Have you done that? Have you asked God to give you his gift of salvation through Jesus Christ? I hope so! If not, you

can ask him right now as you sit here in worship this morning. And, in gratitude to God, you'll want to share this Good News with others.

Now, I know that some of you think you could never talk with other people about Jesus. Evangelism is something that fundamentalists do, not Presbyterians! But the fact is that you already are an evangelist! When you find a new store or restaurant you enjoy, you don't hesitate to tell others about it. When you see a movie or something on Netflix that you like, you don't keep it to yourself. You share that good news with others! So why should sharing the Good News of God's love for all people in Jesus Christ be any different? Why would you want to keep that news to yourself? It seems a little bit selfish, doesn't it?

And there are very simple ways to begin spiritual conversations or to witness to your faith. For example, you can offer to pray for someone who has some kind of need. Or, when a discussion touches on spiritual needs like hope, forgiveness, or courage you can talk about how your faith helps you in those areas. You can invite someone to come with you on a local service project. Or, you can invite someone to church.

Last year one of our members joined other church members to see a musical at the Gettysburg Community Theatre, like we're doing this afternoon. As audience members came into the theatre, most everyone cheerfully greeted her. Sitting next to her was a woman who was not a

church member. “Do you know all these people?” she asked in amazement. “Yes,” our member responded, “they all go to my church!” The woman thought for a moment and said, “I think I want to go to your church!” And our member then took the opportunity to tell her a little bit about GPC. Sometimes its as easy as taking advantage of the opportunities that God throws our way.

When I was a kid, I went to Sunday School each week. I had some wonderful Sunday School teachers over the years. They did a good job of engaging us with the content of the lesson every Sunday, and almost all them found a way to tell us about the a wonderful difference following Jesus Christ made in their lives. Since I respected these folks, that made a big impression on me. I wanted to follow Jesus, too! Maybe you could tell the good news to children and youth like my Sunday School teachers did.

Finally, I saw an article the other day about social media influencers. Do you know about this? Companies try to find people with the largest numbers of social media followers to promote their products or causes. Celebrities like Selena Gomez and Kylie Jenner, and athletes like Cristiano Renaldo (an international soccer star), earn an enormous amount of money by plugging various products and causes on their Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram pages.

Did you know that you are an influencer? You are. Maybe not on-line, but perhaps in your family or among your friends or with your colleagues at work or people you work out with or engage in some other activity with. You are an influencer in a person-to-person way with a number of people. Through your example and words you can help them learn God's secret! And you may also be an influencer through your social media accounts. I've noticed that a number of you share your involvement in GPC through your social media. Thank you! I encourage you to continue to do that or start to do that if you haven't.

Secrets. God wants to help you deal with the destructive ones you've experienced or are carrying around. And I hope you've experienced the wonderful secret of God's love for us through Jesus Christ, and I hope you'll be watching for opportunities God will bring your way to share this secret with others!