

## Because They're Worth It

### Exodus 24:12-18

<sup>12</sup>The LORD said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain, and wait there; and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction." <sup>13</sup>So Moses set out with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God. <sup>14</sup>To the elders he had said, "Wait here for us, until we come to you again; for Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever has a dispute may go to them."

<sup>15</sup>Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. <sup>16</sup>The glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the cloud. <sup>17</sup>Now the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. <sup>18</sup>Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain. Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights.

### Matthew 17:1-9

<sup>1</sup>Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. <sup>2</sup>And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. <sup>3</sup>Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. <sup>4</sup>Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." <sup>5</sup>While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" <sup>6</sup>When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. <sup>7</sup>But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." <sup>8</sup>And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

<sup>9</sup>As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead"

Back in the Depression a woman named Shirley Polykoff was finally going to meet the family of the man she wanted to marry, George Halperin.<sup>1</sup> That's always a little nerve wracking, isn't it? Now, George's family was intimidating. His father was an Orthodox rabbi and his mother was from Europe with extremely formal, old world manners. Shirley wound up doing

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<sup>1</sup> I'm grateful to Malcolm Gladwell's fantastic story "True Colors" he includes in his book [What the Dog Saw and Other Adventures](#). His account of these amazing women provides the basis for their stories included here.

great with dad- he turned out to be hilarious and full of life. But George's mother was as just cold as an ice berg all night long.

The night passed without incident. Then, when George was driving Shirley home to her apartment, she asked him how she did. George, ever polite, said that his sister loved her. Yeah, but how about your mother. He didn't say anything. So she asked him again. And then, after another pause he said, "She thinks you paint your hair." And for a few minutes she didn't say anything. She just sat there in silence. The truth was she did.

Now that may seem like no big deal today, people color their hair all kinds of ways today, but back then it was simply not done. Not by respectable girls, anyway. The only people who colored their hair back then were show girls and women who were known to have "loose morals". But, Shirley, a woman ahead of her time- she just knew that inside she was not a brown haired girl at heart. She knew she was a blonde- and a platinum one at that. But to be judged like that, so coldly, so matter-of-fact- it was humiliating. It hurt.

Well, Shirley Polykoff turned out to be one of the most influential women in America. She's certainly not a household name, but she had an enormous influence on how women today live. In 1956 Shirley worked in the advertising agency Foote, Cone, and Belding. That year she was given the Clairol account. Clairol had come up with this amazing product Miss Clairol, which would allow a woman, from the comfort of her own home, to color her hair in whatever way she liked. Shirley's job was to figure out how to sell it. Never forgetting that moment with the woman who became her mother-in-law Shirley said the idea came to her in a flash. "Does she or doesn't she? Only her hair dresser knows for sure." And the product took off. It took off beyond all expectations. In response Clairol developed more products, and Shirley developed

more advertising. Instead of using glamorous models, Shirley had regular, normal looking moms and always included children all in an effort to wash the stigma of hair color away along with the gray. And when Shirley finally retired from the account in the 70's Clairol had generated and kept enormous market share, and the number of women coloring their hair went from an astonishing 7% to nearly half the women in America. Much of this because Shirley Polykoff believed that a woman not only had the right to color her hair whatever color she liked, but she had the right to a little privacy as well. She had the right to keep a secret.

Secrets. Secrecy plays a vital role in the texts before us this morning.

Our texts for this morning, these two stories- they're so much alike. Even though they are separated by at least a thousand years and are written in different languages, they have so much in common. The Exodus story is about a great leader, Moses, a man who physically led his people out of slavery. Matthew's story is also about a great leader, in this case Jesus, who leads people out of spiritual slavery. In the Exodus story the hero climbs up a great mountain. In Matthew's story the hero does too. In the Exodus story there is a direct experience with God and the glory of God is pictured as being like a glowing cloud. In Matthew's story Jesus also has a direct encounter with God, and a glowing cloud overshadows him and the others with him.

There are so many parallels between these two stories that it's actually the difference, the part that doesn't fit, that stands out. Now the stories aren't identical- there's more than one difference. But the major difference? When Moses receives the ten commandments from God, when he gets those stone tablets into his hands, and he makes the long descent back down the mountain to his people- he shares everything with them. He's entirely transparent with them and

withholds nothing. But when Jesus and the three that are with him down climb that dusty, rocky slope, Jesus swears them to silence. He commands them, orders them not to say a word. He tells them in other words to keep what happened on the mountain a secret.

A secret. A secret. Why would he do that? Why would he tell them to keep it a secret? I mean it's not like what happened on the mountain was a bad thing. It was the transfiguration. Light pours over him like water flowing over a fountain statue. God's voice clatters from the cloud claiming him as God's beloved own Son. Why would you keep all of that a secret?

Secrets are complicated things. On the one hand, like Shirley Polykoff showed, secrets can be a good thing. Her belief was that women have the right to make decisions about their appearance secret. Who would argue with that? Today we're concerned about trying to keep all sorts of our information secret- for us we're more concerned with things like our online identity and our bank account numbers. These are good secrets to keep.

But on the other hand- we're also nervous about secrets. Particularly when it comes to our leaders keeping secrets from us. A lot of you were alive during Richard Nixon's fall. You saw first hand that he coveted secrecy, and it was because, in spite of his protests to the contrary, he really was a crook. Bernie Madoff coveted secrecy, and it was because he was a fraud, a thief. I was in North Carolina last week, right near the home of Presidential candidate John Edwards. And we all know the tragic story now how he coveted secrecy, and all because he had become so terribly broken in the deepest parts of himself he was hurting the people he was supposed to love the most. I think most of the time secrecy makes us nervous, because most of

the time if someone isn't telling us the whole story, it's because there's something going on they don't want us to know about.

Because of this I think it's good news that Jesus doesn't tell Peter and James and John to keep the secret of what happened up there on that mountain forever. It's not like Vegas where what happens on the mountain stays on the mountain. He doesn't tell them to keep what happened absolute secret. No, he tells them to keep what happened quiet until a later time, until the time was right. He just tells them to be quiet for a time. It turns out that time would be when he was no longer with them.

With our text here it isn't about *whether* to tell everyone what happened; it was a question of *when*. See, when you tell a person a thing is just as important as what it is or how it is you tell them.

What made Polykoff's "Does she or doesn't she?" campaign so successful is that she tapped into just the nerve at just the right time. It turned out that millions of women were interested transforming themselves, and all they needed was the right product and a little bit of privacy. But, while it was a successful campaign it wasn't perfect. At least not forever. It spoke to women in the 1950's and 60's, but in the 70's Clairol began to stumble.

See, the problem with keeping a secret like that- well, it was like a mask. And whenever you'd get what you want. Whether it was attracting a man or getting a job- you'd never really know whether you got it because of you, or because of this secret.

Sensing this, and seeing Clairol's weakness, another woman, an incredibly interesting rebel named Ilon Specht, saw an opportunity. Specht was working with an advertising agency to create a campaign for L'Oreal who was trying to break into the hair color market. The story was they had a campaign all ready, but then at the last minute it fell through. And so under huge pressure, Specht and a big group of men sat in a room trying to come up with something to save the day. She remembered sitting around in this room of all men who were just chewing on this done to death idea of using a beautiful, silent woman. She wouldn't say anything. She wouldn't do anything. She'd just sit there. And the whole idea was all about a woman looking good for a man. And finally Specht got so angry sitting there listening to this, she flew into a rage and came up with what would become the most famous hair color ad ever. It featured a woman looking directly into the camera talking about her expensive hair color and how she liked the look and feel of it. And it ended with one of the most famous lines ever- "Why do I use Preference from L'Oreal? Because I'm worth it." To this day an amazing 71% of women know that phrase, and in just a few short years L'Oreal surpassed Clairol as the leading hair color.

Now, that phrase that would never have worked in 1950- it was unthinkable to imagine a woman talking directly to viewers and touting her self-worth then. But in the 1970's women were hungry for it. They were ready to say I'm worth it. No more secrets. Everything out there in the open. It was just the right message at just the right time.

You know, I'm not sure why Jesus decided not to tell the disciples what happened on that mountain when he got down. I'm not sure why he told Peter and James and John to wait until after his death.

Maybe it was because they didn't need a story like that right then. I mean at that point they were still excited. Jesus was going around preaching and teaching and healing. Times were good and they were full of hope. Or, maybe if they heard about what happened, maybe they'd get confused over why it was they were following him in the first place. Maybe they'd become more interested in the magic of the mountain top moment than the real meaning of his ministry.

I don't know. All I know is that he told them to keep that mountain high under their hats- at least until the rest of the disciples were able to receive it. And it's true, when you tell a person something is just as important as what it is you say, or how it is you say it.

This week as you think about all the things you have to do or say, think about that. When you have something to say to someone, especially someone you care about, we always spend time thinking about what it is we want to say, and we might, if the issue is important, even think about how it is we want to say it. Do we want to say it this way or that way? But this week, also consider when it is you want to have that conversation.

If you want it to go well- please don't have it after 9 o'clock, for example. I can't tell you how many stupid arguments between people occur simply because people try to talk about something hard when neither one of them is up to it. I know I've done it. You just start, and then things start going downhill, and you try to salvage it, but it's no good. And you know you just should never have opened your mouth in the first place- you should have just said you want to talk about something, but later- when you're both awake.

Same thing is true if you know your conversation partner is stressed out with too many things going on. Or you are. Or if you don't really have the time to talk to somebody. It's so

awful when you're trying to have a conversation and you can just tell their mind is on something else. If you are the one distracted, it is absolutely OK to say- you know what, I'm not able to focus on you like I would like to. Let's talk about this later. And if you're the one who wants to talk, well, make some notes if you need to, but by all means be glad the person cares enough about you to really want to listen to you.

Now, all this may seem like a lot of work I know. But the people you love- come on, is there anything more important in your world? As Ilon Specht might have said, we should take a little extra time to consider all this because...they're worth it. **Amen.**