Best Friends: Secrets

 September 11th 2022 Scripture Reading: Psalm 139

**SLIDE 1 - TITLE**

I wonder if you could fill in the blank here for me….“Secrets, secrets are no fun. Secrets, secrets hurt someone.” This little rhyme has attempted to serve as a moral compass for many children and maybe some adults. It recognizes the fact that some information is sensitive, confidential and that misuse of such information can result in much harm done. We are familiar with another phrase, this one coming to us from the World War II era. Coined by the War Advertising Council it reads: “Loose lips sink ships”.

**SLIDE 2 – Loose Lips**

In solidarity with the war effort, people were advised to reign in careless talk for fear of spies or other operatives who could put our soldiers into jeopardy. Information is powerful, information can be dangerous, so watch what you say and be mindful of who you say it to. If certain words get out to the wrong people, it could spell disaster.

 We all keep certain secrets. Some are very prudent to keep: like our bank account numbers or investment information. Some we are mandated to keep as in a client/counselor type situation. Some we cannot keep as in the case with a mandated reporter who comes across a situation of suspected harm or abuse. But when it comes to our relationships with our friends, we tend to frown on keeping secrets. In fact, we can pretty much gauge the value of our friendships based upon how much they know about us! A good friend will know a good deal, a great friend will know a great deal and our best friend, well, they will know nearly everything there is to know. When our relationships grow, trust increases and in such a context, we are able to allow that light to shine on some of our deepest, darkest secrets. Let’s hear again the words from our best friend Jesus found in John 15. READ

**SLIDES 3-5 - SCRIPTURE**

 As we mentioned before, Jesus is not trying to hold back any secrets from us. He has made known to us what his Father is doing. And it is certainly no secret what Jesus expects of us from this passage: Love one another! And we are to love as he has loved.

 Alexander Dumas gave us one of the greatest novels of the 1800’s which was subsequently turned into many movies: “The Count of Monte Cristo.” In the story, the main character, Edmond Dantes is wrongfully imprisoned in the dreaded Chateau D’if. Here he suffers through inhuman conditions: extreme isolation, regular beatings, and feeble rations. During the course of his imprisonment, Edmond is surprised by a fellow prisoner who has managed to dig himself a tunnel leading up into Edmond’s cell. Once he overcomes his initial surprise, you can imagine these two quickly becoming best friends…they had so much in common. This other prisoner happened to be an old priest who was bent on achieving one goal. WATCH

**SLIDE 6 – CLIP**

**SLIDE 7 – Monte Cristo Picture**

 So they have worked out a deal, education for manpower. Edmond will help Abbot Feria dig a tunnel while being educated along the way. Besides being an agreement that is beneficial to both parties, these two characters demonstrate a very human trait. We are not computers. A computer is designed to store information. It just sits there and stores. It won’t do anything with that information, unless directed by a human to do something. A computer is inert and really just a receptacle for taking in more and more information. But humans are not made to be storage facilities. We are made to relate and communicate information. We are a conduit for info; not the dead end. We are made to pass it along. Every conversation or interaction we have with other people is an occasion in which we are in the process of passing on some sort of information. That is why computers are so helpful for us. They do the storing, and we do the sharing. Father Feria calls the knowledge he possesses “priceless” and he leverages that value to convince Dantes to assist him in what appears to be the insane project of digging a tunnel to freedom. As they become closer friends, the knowledge shared between them becomes much more personal. WATCH

SLIDE 8 – CLIP 2

SLIDE 9 – Count of Monte Cristo

 Dark secrets are shared, past memories and things that cannot be undone. Feria says that he experiences everlasting shame for the evil things that he has done. After he had committed these sins, he decided to turn his life around, to seek after God and find forgiveness.

 There is a relief and ease of burden that comes with confession. The term for it is catharsis, which comes from the Greek and, as a verb, it literally means to come clean. We cannot receive mercy with an open hand if we are continually clinging to our secret sins. We must expose these sins to the light! We must acknowledge mistakes we have made, hurt we have caused, and the ways in which we have been unfaithful to God. We are not computers meant to store up a backlog of sins! In the Catholic tradition, people are to come and confess verbally to a priest, and while something similar could happen in our church as well, we proclaim Jesus as our high priest. Only he can forgive us our sins, only he can offer us assurance and peace. All we have to do is come clean to our best friend.

**SLIDE 10 - Proverbs**

Proverbs 28:13 sums it up nicely: “Those who hide their sins won’t succeed, but those who confess and give them up will receive mercy.” That is what confession is…giving up our sins, divulging our secrets and trusting that our best friend Jesus will still accept us after all. It is only when we give them up that we then receive mercy.

 Our quest to keep God out of our private life is a fool’s errand anyway. As much as we want to pretend that we can keep secrets from our heavenly Father, like a parent looking through their child’s cell phone, God sees all. Writer Tony Reinke puts it succinctly, “Our Creator is no respecter of privacy laws.”

**SLIDE 11- Psalms 139**

Psalm 139, which we read today makes that abundantly clear. I want to read through some highlights from that passage, but I want us to hear it in two different ways. For the first, imagine an angsty teenager who just got busted for doing something foolish. They must suffer some consequence and so they respond with exasperation: (video?) “You know when I sit down and stand up, you comprehend my plans. There isn’t a word on my tongue you don’t already know. You surround me front and back! Where can I get away from you? Even darkness isn’t dark to you!” But now hear these words as a song of praise in awe of our good Father. One attitude resents the all-knowing mind of God, where the other revels in it. One attitude tries desperately and pathetically to keep a secret life, the other acknowledges and accepts reality. Our inner thoughts, our deepest secrets are no mystery to God. We can run but we cannot hide. The state of our hearts will come to light. But our best friend offers us forgiveness. He can change our teenage rage into a mature contentment, into a peace that passes all understanding. He can cast our sins as far from us as the east is from the west. We can come clean, we can trust our most sensitive information to our best friend Jesus. In fact, you will be invited in just a few minutes to engage in a time of confession before the Lord, a time of letting go and of receiving mercy.

**SLIDE 12 – Dante Quote**

And the end of our clip Dantes says, “God is no more real than your treasure.” And how did the priest respond… “Perhaps…” Perhaps is a word of uncertainty…perhaps keeps possibility alive. Surely we know of those in our lives who would proclaim that God isn’t real. They look at the state of our world, they see the evil things people do and they conclude that there must be no God or if there is then he is certainly not a good one. They would see the Bible as an old book and as good as it might be, it is an awfully silly thing to believe in. These types of viewpoints are not an invitation to come back with bible verses or philosophical arguments or archeological data that helps explain and justify our faith, but it is an occasion to interject a questioning “Perhaps”. Perhaps not everything is as it seems…perhaps there is more to this world than what we can see…Perhaps we are not just random concoctions of space dust.

 Well, at the risk of spoiling this 176 year old story, you may have been able to guess that Feria’s “perhaps” regarding the hidden treasure was more than a suggestion of possibility. As they continue to dig, a small cave-in leaves Feria with a punctured lung. Before he expires, he informs Dantes that he has kept a very important secret. He reveals that there is indeed a treasure to be found and a map with which to find it. And so, in very human form, this information is not merely stored, it is passed on.

 Father Feria refused to die still carrying this secret. He revealed to Dantes the means of finding the treasure, a treasure Dantes was sure did not exist.

We live in a time of surety, don’t we? If we ever have a question about anything under the sun we can google it, read an article about it, feel like we are well informed and move on. For many people, belief in God poses too much uncertainty. We want to be better assured that what we believe is true and scientific fact seems to be the best arbiter we have available to us. But perhaps, God evades scientific fact, perhaps assurance comes after a step of faith, perhaps we are looking with the wrong set of eyes. Perhaps the treasure is real.

**SLIDE 13 - Perhaps**

 Each of us knows someone who does not believe in the saving work of Jesus Christ. Friends, family members, neighbors who go through life not knowing their best friends Jesus, not knowing the treasure available to them. We know Jesus died for them anyway, we know that they are loved and we know that through the power of the Holy Spirit, God is calling out to them even now. We not only know that Jesus is their treasure, we also know how he can be found. We can point out the way, share this map. We can pass on crucial information. This is one secret we dare not keep to ourselves.

**SLIDE 14 – Post it note**

 I trust that God has brought to your mind someone in your life who is an unbeliever. Someone who does not have a relationship with Jesus. If not, that is okay, we will ask him to in a moment, but if you have someone in mind, would you write down their name? For now you can write it on your bulletin sheet, but when you get home, would you write their name on your calendar, or maybe in your phone, or on a post-it stuck to your bathroom mirror? Write somewhere you can see it regularly. And then I want to ask you, for Christ’s sake, to pray for that person. Pray for them every day. Keep them held up to God. I am not asking you to go and preach them a sermon or share with them bible passages, I am simply asking you to pray for this individual every day. We are going to keep this up until November. That’s nearly two months of daily prayer on behalf of someone who does not know our best friend Jesus. Come November, we will look at some ways that we can share our faith with these folks, but for now just pray. Does everyone have someone written down?

**SLIDE 15:**

 Let’s pray.

 ADORATION

CONFESSION (silence)

BRING TO MIND A NAME

 PRAYER FOR LOST (silence)

 AMEN