

"You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased." These words came at the baptism of Jesus, at the beginning of our Epiphany Season. Today, we close the Epiphany season with similar words: "This is my beloved Son, listen to him." These words are spoken on the mountain in what we call The Transfiguration. The text in Luke is not only reaffirming the words of God to Jesus at his baptism, they are trying to sum up all the teaching that Jesus has been doing throughout this Epiphany season. And the words to the disciples on the mountain and to all of us today are: "Listen to him."

The disciples have gone up on a mountain with Jesus to pray. Have they gone up there to get away from it all? That is often the reason we give for vacations, retreats. Our lives are consumed by daily demands. We need to get away. Sometimes in the midst of our getting away time, we are surprised when the retreat becomes engagement, encounter. I love to go to Acadia. I am familiar with a lot of the park. I enjoy the trails and the fall color.

But more often than not, I find myself face to face with the call to life.

If the disciples think this trip up the mountain to pray is a good time to get away from it all for awhile, they are mistaken. When we pray, we have the habit of closing our eyes. I think the reason for that is in closing our eyes we can shut out the world and better focus on God. Well, here on the mountain, the disciples have their eyes opened and they see who Jesus is. The veil is pulled back and they recognize the glory of Jesus as the messiah.

That question, who is Jesus, is on our minds every time we gather here for church. In the quietness, the beauty of this sanctuary, we are like the disciples going up on the mountain. We come to pray. We come to worship. We step back from the cares of our busy work, home, activity world. We want to be in the presence of God. For the Christian, Jesus helps us come into this presence of God.

Scholars have long sought to fine and define the historical Jesus. Who is Jesus? Who is the real Jesus? By working through ancient documents and artifacts, they hope to uncover who Jesus really was and is. The disciples themselves understood this question and wanted answers also. "Who is this that even the wind and sea obey him?" But history refuses to reveal much solid historical evidence about Jesus. What history does show us is a lot about the people making the search. About twenty years ago, a group of questors called

"The Jesus Seminar" used the question "Can we really know anything about Jesus? They used ancient texts and tried to identify the authentic words of Jesus. When they were through, there was not much of Jesus left to know. The real Jesus produced by these scholars looks suspiciously like the professors. Albert Schweitzer in his book "QUEST FOR THE HISTORICAL JESUS" said that those who attempted to discover this Jesus looked down a dark well, hoping to see Jesus. But down at the bottom of the well, they saw only a reflection of themselves.

Whoever Jesus is, I do not think he was some wandering sage, full wise sayings and good advice. If what we needed in our lives was good advice, God would have sent us a seminar and not Jesus. There may be a difference between the Jesus we want and the Jesus we need. We want approval, affirmation, of the way we do it. What we need is forgiveness, reconciliation. We need this call to life that is beyond ourselves.

We talk and sing a lot about God's glory. Yet I suspect if you ask either church or unchurched people what "Glory" is, you will likely get a blank stare. How do you recognize glory? Is in the thousands of stained glass windows and haloed paintings? Is it in the commitment of Jesus? The text today is difficult. There are very few in this world who experience the kind of Transfiguration that is depicted in our text in Luke complete with dazzling rays of light, supernatural appearance of past heroes of the

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faith, and voices that come from the clouds. It all seems so unworldly to me. While Jesus clothes became dazzling white the phrase that strikes me is "the appearance of his face changed." To me that doesn't have to be supernatural. Jesus face "lit-up" I can identify with that. Anyone can who has ever seen a Child's face light up at the sight of a cake full of birthday candles. We can remember the feel of the muscles in our own face when we "lit-up" at the sight of one we deeply love. On a wedding day, we use the term radiant to speak of the bride.

And like Jesus and the disciples, we have certainly stepped aside to pray, to meditate, to examine our life.

Peter was overcome by the glory of it all, wants to build booths, to stay up on the mountain. But the Jesus in our text today is on the way to Jerusalem. This Moses and Elijah appearance just confirms for him that his task was in the same mode of the Law and the Prophets. And I think the disciples with him were transformed also. They recognized anew the call to be followers.

Sometimes we are like the prodigal son who have wandered into a far country. We are like him, looking to find our way back home. If once we make a terrible mistake are we fixed forever to go on in our error? We search for this fresh beginning. It is in the light of this passage that we understand the Jesus we need. Jesus comes down from the mountain to share in the hurt, the brokenness, the searching for a place to begin again.

I think we want to catch a vision of the Kingdom of God. We want to see the Big Picture, not just our little part of it. Luke tries to do justice to the whole Bible – and it is difficult to do in one story. Luke has Moses (law), Elijah (prophets) and the Gospel of Jesus. The church talks about Jesus as human and divine, glorified and humble, clear and baffling. I think our words many times say the same thing that we hear in this passage for today. It is not just the Baptism saying of This is my beloved son. It is saying, "Listen to him." This Sunday is a good springboard to Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent. We use that time as a deliberate call for us to listen and follow the words of grace and kindness, of forgiveness and reconciliation that we hear in the voice of Jesus.

I once saw a cartoon picturing a long religious pilgrim with a staff, a long beard and a haggard look. Stopping at a fork in the road, the religious seeker faces a sign. One arrow points toward "The Meaning of Life." Another arrow points in the opposite direction toward "Cheese and Crackers." If that pilgrim believes in the incarnation, that God is present with us, he will not hesitate for a second. He will head straight for the cheese and crackers where others will be gathered to eat and to talk, and perhaps to sing and dance. We will not find the God present in an abstract concept, a vague idea, a collection of words. Rather we find the meaning of life and love and the grace of God as we, like Jesus, come down from the mountain and live in community together.

Resources used in preparing this sermon: Pulpit Resource, Interpretation – Luke, Circuit Rider Nov-Dec issue, Meditation on Incarnation by Thomas H. Toerger and the Abingdon Women's Preaching Annual series 2 year C.