

# PILGRIM C H U R C H

An open and affirming congregation of the United Church of Christ

## A NEW WAY OF SEEING

Ephesians 1: 15 – 23 May 24, 2009

Pilgrim Bud Precise

“How do you see it?” That question is not about what we see with our eyes. It is a question asking for our interpretation. It asks us to reflect in our own understanding about the state of things. Closing Guantanamo. Barak Obama – Notre Dame - Abortion. Recession. The Bible Bill. All these issues ask us for interpretation – “How do you see it?” The young man approached Jesus and asked, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus answers him, “What is written in the law? How do you see it?” Interpretation. In the best judgment of your experience and understanding, “How do you see it?” We trust people to know certain things. We say, “I am going to ask (insert your own name) about that. She/he will know about it.

Our text today comes from Ephesians. Most scholars think that the book was composed as a circular letter, intended to be passed around to a group of churches. Perhaps the original version of the letter had a blank space for the insertion of a place-name. There is evidence that this was a practice in that day. There is no personal greeting usually found in Paul’s letters. Scholars think the letter was written by a well-known disciple and companion of Paul and published under his name during his final imprisonment. I can’t answer all the questions about authorship of the letter. That would not make much of a sermon anyway.

An important concept in the book is the understanding of baptism. How do believers understand themselves as those who are able to stand against the evil of the day – against imperial Rome!! The New Testament answer is that in baptism they have “put off” the old nature and “put on” the new humanity – they are new creations in Christ.

“Once you were no people, now you are God’s people” ( 1 Peter 2:10

“I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you.” “As you come to know him.” What happens as we come to know someone? We learn, we grow in our understanding. Surely that is important of understanding of God. There is this bumper sticker I see on cars. “The Bible says it. I believe it. That settles it.” Really? No room for a question?

I was home from college for the weekend. On Saturday night, late, a car ran into a tree in our yard and the girl in the passenger seat was killed. The driver, her boy friend, was drunk. The parents refused to press charges against the driver, who was a friend of mine. They said “It was God’s will.” What? No questions? What kind of God would cause a drunk driver to kill their daughter? I had real questions about that sort of God. I also had questions about what sort of parent could pass the death of a child off with that sort of thinking?

“As you come to know him.” Baptism does mean I have decided who I am. That I have decided to live my life ordered after the example of Christ. But baptism does not mean the end of my learning about God. The Christian faith is not about being saved so I can go to heaven. It is about living – and living means growing in

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## CHURCH

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faith and understanding. One thing I like about Pilgrim is our encouraging questions – our openness to new ideas, new thought. I am not much for closing minds and making everyone believe the same thing. Our UCC

slogan says, “God is still speaking.” I think evidence of that is our Open and Affirming stance here at Pilgrim. We are called to grow in our understanding and our trust in God. As we come to know God in our living, in our experience, we grow in our understanding and commitment.

Another verse in our text that speaks to that is “with the eyes of your heart enlightened.” Both Plato and Aristotle speak of “eyes of the soul.” It is that part of our nature by which we apprehend the truth which lies behind appearances. The reference to heart is Hebraic. This enlightenment of the heart is not mere intellectual acuteness. It is a flooding of the whole inward being with the light of divine truth. It is the gift of sight to the spiritually blind – “the eyes of your heart enlightened.” The bible does not belittle intellectual gifts. We all know the phrase, “fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me.” But our salvation does not depend on educational acquirement. The intellect is not the center of our real selves. What is it that keeps watch over love – hate; loyalty – treachery; trust – mistrust. Truth is we still do not have a better word than heart.

“Blessed are the pure in heart.”

“The Lord looks on the heart.” We can give someone a heart transplant. But only God can give us a new heart. The bible is full of words like rebirth, repentance, grace, salvation – when our heart is touched by God’s judgment and grace, enlightenment results. It has to do with our whole being.

The hope to which we are called. We are trying to work on that through our process of discernment – our looking for a permanent space for us to locate as a church. Our calling is not answered through our quarterly reports of our membership.

Our calling will not be answered by the latest seminar to make the church relevant. Our calling is bound up with this idea that we are the People of God. God calls us to the future – and though it is uncertain, we are confident of the presence of God among us. The churches addressed in this letter for today were trying to resolve what it meant to be Jewish, Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians. There were many questions. I believe the context of today’s society presents the church with many questions. How are we faithful as the People of God in the midst of problems - real problems that infuse our whole culture. Immigration. Poverty. Sexuality. Torture. Recession.

John Kennedy used the word, “Some people see things that are and ask, why. I see things that have never been and ask, why not?” “With the eyes of our hearts enlightened” is asking for a new way of seeing. That way of seeing has to do with the kinship of our soul with the people living about us. That way of seeing has to do with the ideas of justice, compassion. It has to do with our including in society those who are pushed to the fringe by much of the world. The enlightened eyes of our hearts call us to a new way of seeing, which will call us to a new way of living. “May God give us a spirit of wisdom as we come to know God, so that with the eyes of our hearts enlightened, we may know what is the hope to which God calls us.”