

PILGRIM

C H U R C H

An open and affirming congregation of the United Church of Christ

THIS IS MY SON, MY CHOSEN; LISTEN TO HIM

Luke 9:28-36; 37 – 43a February 14, 2010

Pilgrim Bud Precise

What is it that gives authority?

Well, a policeman with a badge giving directions for traffic has authority. A judge in a courtroom handing down a sentence has authority. A teacher, a minister, our parents – they speak with authority. The president of the United States gives an address and we listen. We do listen to voices of authority. But we must admit, there are times when these people I have mentioned are questioned as to how much authority they have. They may still have the badge, the bench in the courtroom, the office or position, but we don't put much stock in what they have to say. Authority can be a given. But to remain operable, there must be an element of trust. If you see the movie "PRECIOUS", you will discover in the end that the parent loses every ounce of authority and respect expected from a child. There have been times, when I have not even bothered to listen to a presidential address. I had lost all trust in what that particular president might say.

Authority. What gives Jesus authority in our text for today? This transfiguration story is busy – a lot of stuff going on here. The stories familiar to us are sometimes the stories we actually know least about. We take them for granted. It is like driving home from work. We have taken the same familiar route so much that we scarcely notice what we are passing. One day we look around and wonder, when did that gas station go up?

Jesus takes these three disciples – Peter, James and John (actually the first three chosen) upon a mountain. While Jesus is praying, his face changes, his clothes become dazzling white. Suddenly Moses and Elijah appear and are talking with Jesus. A cloud overshadows them. The disciples are afraid. (And I would be too.) There is this voice saying, "This is my Son, my chosen; listen to him." Authority is present. God is speaking.

Our text comes immediately after Jesus' first prediction that he is going to Jerusalem and he will endure suffering, and be killed and he will be raised on the third day. Luke is not the only gospel that places our text following this prediction. Mark and Matthew also have this transfiguration story following this passion prediction. This story, like the baptism story is giving authority to Jesus.

Do you remember the story of the baptism of Jesus? After he is baptized, there is this voice from heaven that only Jesus hears – "You are my Son, the Beloved. With you I am well pleased." The voice of God speaks again, but this time the three disciples hear the voice. Authority. This is God's words to these disciples. "This is my son, my chosen; listen to him."

I don't have all the answers to this mystery of God's presence on the mountain. We hear this transfiguration story, and we sorta say "yeah." What we usually do – ministers who preach on this text – is we immediately connect the transfiguration scripture about Jesus to the following passages. We emphasize Jesus taking the disciples down the mountain into the arena of service to community. We talk about mountaintop experiences, but we remind everyone that all life is not lived on a mountaintop. There is always the valley. And that is one way to interpret this story. We remove the emphasis from this vision of the presence of God to a safe position – one we are comfortable with. A vision of God, this spirit stuff entering our life, makes us uncomfortable. We often try to move the meaning to familiar ground.

I will admit that this story of the transfiguration loses much of its' power if it does not include the moment when Jesus and his disciples come down from the mountain. But this transfiguration story is asking us

to see Jesus differently. It also means seeing the disciples differently. And it does ask us to see ourselves and others differently.

“This is my Son, my chosen; listen to him.”

To me that voice resonates with the words from the man they meet when they come down the mountain. This man from the crowd shouts to Jesus, “Teacher, I beg you to look at my son. He is my only Child.”

“This is my Son, my chosen; listen to him.” Does that voice speak to us today? Does it speak to our congregation? Do we hear it in our lives? Or, are these words about a transfigured Jesus just nice words, in a story that we find difficult to understand?

Let me try out some words of you today. How and where and when do we hear this Son, this chosen that God is talking about? I think today of Libba and John and their family and the recent death of Libba’s mother. Surely the words of healing and mercy are important to her. Words of comfort and presence of the Spirit of God are most helpful in a time of loss and sorrow. “Listen to Him.” Yes, and how does Libba and John hear those words. The words of comfort and presence are spoken through our voices, our cards, our presence. And it is not just Libba and her family. There are people we do not know who listen to our words. They want to hear words of comfort and care. Let us attend to these words that God calls us to speak.

Just this past week, Polly, Annie, Jack and John moved to Wisconsin. We do celebrate with Polly and John new jobs. So we offer words of congratulations. They are sincere and welcomed by them. We will also miss their presence among us. They need to hear the words of assurance of God’s care for them. We want them to find a congregation and use their gifts and dedication to God in a new place. We need also to hear God’s words of assurance and care for us. Polly, Annie, Jack and John were and are important to us. You know one thing I celebrate today. Mandy has begun the work of worship chairperson with us. Do you hear the words, “This is my Son, my chosen; listen to him.”

The military, once again, is having trouble accepting gay and lesbian people willing to give their lives, if need be, in the service of our country. The military wants to study “Don’t ask, don’t tell” for another year. Listen. Do you hear the words God speaks – “You are my Son, my Daughter, my chosen. I am proud of you.” I hope you gay and lesbian members of our congregation hear those words today. That slogan is more than words on a poster. “Who ever you are, where ever you are, You are welcome here.” I see them as God still speaking. The military might have trouble accepting gays and lesbians, but God does not have that problem.

However you interpret this transfiguration story for today, I believe those words spoken on the mountain to Jesus must find expression in our daily living. They must be lodged in our words, our actions, our calling to be God’s people in our own day. The words God speaks to us, the words God speaks through us are words that bring life. The direction for our service comes from our listening for the word God speaks to us.

Master speak, thy servant hear eth, waiting for thy gracious word.

Longing for Thy voice that cheers us, Master, let it not be heard.

I am listening Lord for thee. What hast thou to say to me?