

**Transfiguration Sunday  
and  
Celebration of the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Hillcrest Congregational Church**

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them,

"Tell no one about the vision until after the Human One has  
been raised from the dead."

Sisters and brothers of Hillcrest, esteemed guests, friends, visitors, members of Council, and most especially members of the board of Trustees, as I interpret these words of Jesus—tell no one about this vision until resurrection day—I'm thinking it means that I shouldn't be preaching anymore until after Easter. So, I plan to take a few weeks off--and I think we can all go home now. Good? Well, maybe not. Maybe Jesus has some work, some mountaintop work for Hillcrest to do.

**Recall a pattern, a strong pattern, that we've seen from Jesus already**—we've spent part of January and the better part of February coming back to it again and again in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. No sooner was Jesus baptized, with those strong and direct words from God,

"THIS is my Son, my Child, the beloved one, with whom I  
am well pleased,"

—no sooner do we get that than Jesus, in the first chance he gets following baptism—in his great first extended teaching and preaching in the Sermon on the Mount—Jesus over and over again puts it right back onto his followers that

**they—and we—are God's children, God's beloved.**

Remember that? And then here those same words

"This is my Son, the Beloved; with whom I am well  
pleased."

And then he added:

"Listen to him!"

I dunno about you, but when my mother said, "Listen..." we pretty much did. And it was good for us—if you know what I mean. Well here God says, **Listen. Listen to Jesus.**

So let's review, just quickly, what Jesus had said last time God told us that this was God's Beloved. The one with whom God was well pleased.

Jesus, turned it right back on us. Speaking to his followers:

**Blessed are the peacemakers, THE PEACEMAKERS.** Why? **For they—you—will be called Children of God.** YOU all—will be called Children of God,

A little later in the Sermon on the Mount: **Let your light so shine before others, that they may see your good works and—and what?—and give glory to your father in heaven.**

Let's not get hung up on the use of Father. Mother. Parent. It all fits. What's the point? When you let your light shine—when you act up and act out as who and what you are—which is God's Children—then people will take note and give glory to God.

**THEN** the meaning was clear: You are children of *God*, not Caesar, and not anyone or anything else by which the world, or those in (worldly) power might try to limit you and your sense of self.

**NOW** the meaning is still clear: You, we (it's a plural you—You all) are children of God—not of the United States or of the Republican Party of the Democratic party, or of a public sector union or of management—You are children of God...and not anyone or anything else by which others might try to limit you and your sense of self. Act like God's Children—people will take note! And give glory to God.

On a day such as this—a great day, a proud day, a day for giving thanks...and for remembering...and for looking ahead—we want—arguably even need—to remember! Well, when I was preparing for this day, and—among other things—reading thru our wonderful 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary History Book, I was struck by the great prose in that Jubilee volume about our “roots” which go back “directly to the Puritan Separatists in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century England” who “passionately seeking religious freedom...made their way to America” and how that “Pilgrim faith of 380 years ago still essentially define[s] us and remain[s] the] under-girding tenet of our faith today”. So our Hillcrest Jubilee history volume.

Great stuff. Now I've taken classes on Congregationalist and UCC history and polity, I've read a lot about the matter, I've taught classes on it, run workshops and seminars where we had nationally recognized experts come in. And for all of that, the best illustration of one part of our history and character that I know of this. Here's how it goes— **How do you explain the rugged individualism of New England Puritans?**

Something like this—

A traveler was lost in New England. Poor guy. This was before GPS and Google maps and that sort of thing. He was driving all over the place, in circles, wasn't getting anywhere. He needed to get to Camden [or substitute in any name of any town you'd like] and for the life of him he couldn't figure it out how to get to Camden. He was lost.

Finally he comes to a fork in the road with two signs. The one sign says Camden—this way. The other sign says Camden—that way.

Well he's so late already, that he doesn't wanna commit without having some assurance that he will in fact get to Camden, and that this is the right Camden, and that he takes the quickest way possible. So he sits.

And just then a car comes by from the opposite direction. He flags it down. Good, he thinks, this clearly looks like a local. He points the driver—a crusty old new Englander—to the sign and says, 'which way should I take to Camden.' The driver says, "Doesn't matter to me," and drove away. Now that's rugged individualism! That's separatism—at least in some sense.

But, as I hope we all know, that's only half the story, in so many ways, the least important half. The most important half—the half that gave birth to us, so to speak—is how our Congregationalist and UCC forbears understood the very expression of Christian identity. Exactly 405 years ago, those who would become the Pilgrims drafted the so-called **Scrooby Covenant**. I think they were listening to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

Listen to the first line:

**"As the Lord's free people"**—NOT by any label or pigeon hole that any one or any organization or any institution would put us—as the Lord's free people—that is, *as God's children*, which is who God, and Jesus, call us to be—"we joyn (old spelling of "join") our selves by covenant...in the fellowship of the Good news, to walk together in God's ways according as God is pleased to reveal God's self unto us." Wow.

**"As the Lord's free people, we join ourselves by covenant...in the fellowship of the Good news to walk together in God's ways according as God is pleased to reveal God's self to us."**

*God is still speaking!* And God is still speaking to us! And God is still speaking to us to be God's children—together—walking together and modeling together God's ways of justice and God's truth in and for the world.

God bless our forbears for their drafting of that statement, and God bless Jesus' insistence—as God's chosen one, as God's beloved—God bless Jesus' insistence that we are all children of God and are called to act like it for each other and for the world.

I wonder if that was something Jesus had to learn. No, I don't mean to be heretical here, but I do mean to take note of these mountaintop stories in Matthew's Gospel. As we draw this sermon to a close, keep an eye with me, will you, on **three uses of the imagery of Mountain in Matthew's Gospel**.

**FIRST**—we've mentioned, and we've been looking at it for weeks, is the Sermon on the Mount with Jesus' insistence that we are all God's children, destined to receive God's justice, and called to expect such justice for ourselves and to treat others accordingly—even as, especially as, that justice counters what the world assumes or expects.

The Sermon on the Mount ends, interestingly, with Jesus coming down from the mountain alone. Oh, great crowds followed him—to be sure—Matthew tells us that in 8:1—but in the description it is clear that Jesus is walking alone. I wonder if Jesus learned a lesson.

**Here**, in this extraordinary mountaintop experience—I wish we had the time to go into all of this imagery and all of this biblical history—Jesus with MOSES AND Elijah—Gee, you can't do much better than. Where's Ron or other Musicians? I mean, take your pick. Jimi Hendrix—with Robert Johnson AND Muddy Watters. Or, I dunno, great composers: Beethoven, with Bach AND Mozart. It's silly, its so incomparable—Jesus, with Moses—the great lawgiver who himself had seen God—at least kinda, sorta seen God up on Mount Sinai; and Elijah—the great prophet, in some ways the first great prophet, who seems never to have died, as he was taken up in that incredible—and by incredible, I do mean incredible—event down by the River Jordan. And here they all are. Of course, Of course, Peter—a sort of spokesperson for the group, of course he says, it is good to be here. Let's stay here. Let's hang out. Kinda like Woodstock. I'll build some tents, maybe we can helicopter some people in.

And Jesus says NO. No we're not staying. BUT, and here's the BUT—I'm not going down there alone. We are ALL God's children. Oh yeah, I'm the chosen one and I've got things to do—and Lent and Easter are all about that—BUT you've got things to do, the kinds of things we were talking about on that mountain back there during the Sermon on the Mount. And so, remember this: the strength and the power and the meaning of all that Biblical truth and wisdom, Moses and Elijah, the Law and the Prophets, the call to be God's people in your time and place—remember all that, hold it with you. But, don't tarry here.

**GET UP**, says Jesus, **GET UP AND DON'T BE AFRAID** to live out what you are called to do and be.

And if we had time we'd follow them down the mountain. And we'd go into all that happens on the way down that mountain in Matthew Chapter 17 and how the disciples got scared and frustrated and how they DON'T remember who they are, and what they've seen, and the power and wisdom at their disposal as God's children. And then we'd get to that famous saying, you know it, but I bet you've never connected it into the Sermon on the MOUNT or to the MOUNT of Transfiguration. Jesus says, still standing in the shadow as it were, of that glorious mountain of the Transfiguration story, Jesus says:

“For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, Move from here to there, and it will move and nothing will be impossible for you.”

**DO you get it?** Peter wanted to stay. Put. On that mountain—and what a great mountain it was. And Jesus said, No. Get up! And, don't be afraid! For heaven's sake you all are God's children. Come with me. Take this mountaintop experience with you. And when they didn't, he said—Truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain of transfiguration over here, move with me. And you know what? It will. Because you are God's. And God, and God's resources—as embodied in Moses, and Elijah, and me—God's resources and power and wisdom are with you.

**So Get up, Do not be afraid.**

Hillcrest, as we enter our sixty first year—our sixty first year of a dear and precious and great and God-blessed planting here on Gregory Lane, let us Get up. Let us not be afraid. Let us move forward together as God's children, let us move in and with faith. And when we do, the power of that mountaintop of transfiguration will move with us. That's God's promise. The mountain will move with us.

And to that, let all of God's people say together, AMEN.