

**CHRIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH, SPARTA, NC**  
**Last Sunday After the Epiphany, February 14, 2010**  
**The Rev. J. Barry Kramer**  
**"Choices"**

*"...and from the cloud a voice said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!'" [Matthew 17:5 NRSV]*

This morning we do more than just listen to him, for indeed, we journey with him up a mountain. It is a big step we take as we move with him toward Jerusalem. Some of us would want specifics, asking "Where is this moun-tain?" Some of us might even break out our atlas to determine which mountain might have been the setting. Others would be happy with the words of a tour guide who once said, "What difference does it make which mountain? The fact is that he was somewhere nearby!" But the choice of choices is to identify that the mountain setting is saying something about the time Jesus spent in prayer and in a close relationship with God. More than closeness, it is a place for Jesus to get his bearings once again, and to draw strength and assurance for the days ahead. For him, it is an important choice to go up this mountain. For us, it is also an important choice because we are given a chance to "listen in" on this relationship. We are also given a view of a Jesus who has chosen to work in close concert with God.

The story that we share this morning is commonly known as the Transfigur-ation. Most preachers throughout Christendom who use this text today will try to show what it means to be "trans-figured", and how every Christian ought to strive for it! Since we have already been striving for that in this congreg-ation for the past year, let us this time look instead at our mountain climb from the perspective of making choices, and of who makes them!

The first choice is about who makes the trip. Often referred to as the three Biblical stooges, Peter, James and John get the nod. True to their character-ization, they fall asleep and miss most of the show. They awake just in time to see Moses and Elijah fading from sight, and to hear some vague conversation between these three great religious figures that seems to have something to do with Jesus' departure. As usual, they are caught off guard by these new travel plans and therefore are quite frightened by a mysterious cloud which engulfs the scene. Peter reacts predictably when he suggests building a monument to this great event. He doesn't understand that the event is not over yet and that a great choice is about to be revealed. One can only imagine the reaction when a voice speaks from the cloud and proclaims that Jesus is the Chosen One, the Beloved of God. An important choice has been made.

Immediately prior to the story of the Transfiguration, Jesus has told his followers that he would be rejected and killed. If this were a movie or a video, the music would now be getting louder and more ominous as we are prepared for the dangers that lay ahead. It is almost as if heaven is bracing for this coming horror and in doing so, it is attempting to prepare some of

Earth's representatives as well. It is almost as if we are being prepared for the choice of whether or not we want to continue watching this show!

Some Biblical scholars have suggested that this heavenly scene is really a resurrection type memory that has been put back into the earlier ministry of Jesus. Call it an "editorial insert" if you will. But editorial inserts don't carry through on established Biblical themes. In this case, we need to back up almost three years to the time of Jesus' baptism. As you may recall, there too, a voice sounded from a cloud. The words are almost identical: "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." The story is the same; the choice is not a recent one.

It is not the first time God has spoken like this. It may be an oversimplification, but we could go back to the garden of Eden, when God said "choose knowledge or obedience." Isn't it interesting that it was knowledge that got us into all this trouble? Noah's choice was easier; build a boat or drown! Abraham was offered a nation of descendants if he chose to follow God. To Moses, God said, "I put before you this day life and death. Choose life! Loch Heim!" It was God who also chose kings and prophets, and finally, a Messiah. Indeed, throughout Scripture, it always seems to be God who is choosing.

But from now on we will witness a shift in the story's theme. No longer will it be just God who chooses, if indeed it ever was; instead it will be clear that this Jesus is also making conscious choices. True, the ultimate choice is the Creator's, but not to the extent that the Chosen One is a helpless puppet, bouncing around on strings. You can even call it the fulfillment of a destiny, if you will, but there are definitely choices along its pathways.

This morning's text - part of our preparation for the Lenten season - tells us as we begin our journey to Jerusalem that Jesus has made the choice. Jesus has made the choice because God has first chosen. The cross is not something over which God has lost control. Instead it became an instrument of God's grace, no matter how evil it may seem. Likewise evil continues in this modern world, and we continue to participate in it. Sometimes it almost seems as if we have no choice!

But while we had and have our choices to make - this Easter event, this man Jesus - this was God's choice. Precisely because it was God's choice, it has mattered all these years. Precisely because it was God's choice, it is the central event of our lives today.

Be aware that this Lent, and after, you here at Christ Church will have many choices to make. A new priest, the challenge of looking for and accepting new members, finding new ways to reach out to others; indeed you will be asked to climb many mountains. Thinking to be transfigured, you may instead fall back into the valley of choices! This is not a bad thing, not if you remember that the ultimate choice has been made - Jesus has chosen you to represent his church in this community! All you have to do is to hear once again the words of God: "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; *listen to him!*"