

Sermon by Rev. Dr. Michael J. Hoyt
Glenshaw Presbyterian Church
Christ the King Sunday
November 21, 2004

Cruciform Authority

Luke 23:33-43

Christ the King Sunday is a good Sunday for a baptism
There is no more appropriate day for us to hear words of the risen Jesus to his disciples
 “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me;
 Go therefore and make disciples ...and baptize...”

When Jesus says this to his disciples he has become the exalted Christ
 and he is about to ascend into heaven
Since this comes toward the end of the story,
 it is tempting for us now to think only of Jesus
 as the risen and exalted king.

But today in the Gospel of Luke,
 we read nothing about resurrection, ascension or exaltation;
 today we get the story of the cross.
But what does crucifixion have to do with authority?
What kind of authority does the crucified Jesus really have?
I suspect it's a kind of authority that's not very popular these days,
 Mel Gibsons “Passion” notwithstanding.

Author Robert Capon presents an accurate picture of our typical American Messiah --
 and it doesn't look much like Jesus on the cross.

He writes that...

“The true paradigm of the ordinary American view of Jesus is Superman:
 “Faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive,
 able to leap tall buildings in a single bound. It's Superman!
 Strange visitor from another planet,
 who came to earth with powers and abilities far beyond those of mortal men,
 and who, disguised as Clark Kent,
 mild-mannered reporter for a great metropolitan newspaper,
 fights a never-ending battle for truth, justice
 and the American Way.”

Jesus -- gentle, meek and mild, but with secret, souped-up, more-than-human insides --
 bumbles around for thirty-three years,
 nearly gets himself done in for good by the Kryptonite Kross,
 but at the last minute, struggles into the phone booth of the Empty Tomb,
 changes into his Easter suit and,
 with a single bound, leaps back up to the planet Heaven.

It's got it all -- including, just so you shouldn't miss the lesson, kiddies:
 He never once touches Lois Lane.”

Capon goes on to say that

“The human race is, was and probably always will be
deeply unwilling to accept a human messiah.

We don't want to be saved *in* our humanity; we want to be fished *out* of it...

It's not that we weren't looking for the Messiah;

it's just that he wasn't what we were looking for.

Our kind of Messiah would come down from a cross.

He would carry a folding phone booth in his back pocket.

He wouldn't do a stupid thing like rising from the dead.

He would do a smart thing like never dying.”ⁱⁱ

But Luke insists, Jesus wasn't that kind of Messiah. He was who he was.

He did not possess the religious authority of the Jewish leaders,

who mocked him, saying that if he were the real Messiah he would save himself.

He did not possess the imperial authority of the Roman soldiers,

who mocked him, saying that if he were a real King he would save himself.

He did not possess the militant authority of the desperate criminal crucified beside him

who wanted someone to help him get revenge

on Roman, state-sponsored terrorism.

Jesus possessed a different authority.

Jesus possessed the authority of a man who would love you enough to forgive you

even as you're nailing him to a cross and laughing at him while he dies.

Who else can do that?

The word “authority” in the Greek is *exousia* –

ex meaning “out of”

ousia meaning “being or substance”

Out of one's being, out of one's substance.

The word suggests that true authority comes not from the power of position,

but from the integrity of one's being,

from a life lived out of one's inner substance, one's authentic self.

If a person lives out the true substance of who they are,

and the life lived out of the that true substance is compelling to you,

then you will grant that person authority.

Anything else is sheer manipulation and coercion.

Jesus lived his life out of his true substance, out of his being which was both

fully God and fully human –

fully God in the power of his love;

fully human in his experience of life and suffering.

True authority is not measured by the power that you lord over others.

True authority is measured by the power of your love for others.

True authority is not measured by the degree to which you can remove yourself

from another's suffering,

but by the degree to which you are willing to enter into their suffering
in search of God's presence and grace.
God's authority is revealed to us in that God, God's very self,
entered into the suffering of the world.
In Jesus Christ crucified God's authority *for us* is established,
and God's love is revealed to be the most powerful force in the universe.

So who will be your authority?

Those who demonstrate the power to manipulate and coerce the world
into submission?

Those who are able to separate themselves from the suffering of humanity?

Or the One who *enters into* the suffering of humanity
to demonstrate the power of his love?

The good news and the hard news is – the choice is yours.

ⁱ Robert Capon, *The Romance of the Word: One Man's Love Affair with Theology* pp. 90-91.