**WEST CENTER CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, UCC June 28, 2015**

***Only Believe***

**A Sermon on Confirmation Sunday by the Rev. John M. Barrett**

**WELCOME**

Good morning, and welcome to worship at West Center Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, on this Confirmation Sunday, when we will recognize and celebrate the faith, hope and love of Lauren Mitchell and Benjamin Rice with their Confirmation.

**THE WITNESS OF ST PAUL** 2Corinthians 8:7-15

Today St Paul is giving us what seems to me to be good advice: Following the example of the generosity of Jesus, we are called to do what we desire to do and complete what we start, according to our means, using what we have, rather than trying to use what we don’t have.

**THE CONFIRMATION OF LAUREN MITCHELL AND BENJAMIN RICE**

One of the many wonderful things about being part of our West Center Church community is the opportunity it affords us to see our children grow up before our eyes, becoming teenagers, and in the case of Lauren and Ben, who are mature for their age, young adults.

My memory is pretty good, but for the life of me, I can’t remember when Lauren and her family were not part of West Center Church. It seems as though Lauren has always been here, making music with her family, and asking and answering questions from the time she was a little girl. I remember the Sunday Lauren and her father, Charles, were baptized, right here in the Chancel. It was March 27, back in 2011. (I admit I had to look up the date!)

And then there’s Ben. Ben came to us in 2009 as a nine-year old, and then returned five years later, last September, transformed into a teenager. And although Ben has not been at West Center very long in numbers of years, I can hardly remember a time when Ben wasn’t with us either. Like Lauren, Ben makes a difference. At Ben’s eighth grade graduation last Tuesday, Ben was honored for achievement in music and social studies. He also received a Westchester County Award for Effort and Achievement. Well done, Ben and Lauren!

I remember the Sunday when Ben and his brothers: Ernest, Jesse and Dameon stood here with their parents in the Chancel and were baptized. That was a very special day, Sunday, May 16th 2010, about ten months before Lauren was baptized.

As acolytes, Lauren and Ben have added beauty to each Sunday’s worship service by processing down the center aisle and lighting our altar candles, bringing the candles to life as a reminder of God’s light, God’s presence among us.

This morning we are recognizing the work that Lauren and Ben have done with their talented and dedicated teacher, Omar Noel, over the years. We are recognizing the learning that Lauren and Ben have done, and the growth of their faith, so that they have decided to come before us today, with their families, to confirm for themselves the baptismal vows that their families made for them when they were children.

Lauren and Ben’s Church School teacher, Omar Noel will be standing up here with them, as he always has. So please come forward to the Chancel, Omar. Omar has taught in our Church School for five years. He came as a first-year student at Sarah Lawrence College in 2009, left for his Junior Year Abroad in South Africa, came back to teach his senior year, and then for two years post-graduation. Omar, we can’t thank you enough for your dedication to West Center Church and your love for your students over the years!

Omar will be teaching Church School through July and August, and then he will be going on his way. As Omar told me, his work here will be finished. And I say that Omar’s influence will continue forever in the lives of his students. Thank you Omar.

I now invite Lauren Mitchell and Benjamin Rice to come to the Chancel with their parents, their aunts, uncles and godparents to be Confirmed.

**THE GOSPEL WITNESS** Mark 5:21-43

The Gospel Witness for today is the story of two healings, one of a penniless woman and the second, of the young daughter of a prominent leader of the synagogue. In the story, Jesus’ busy day is interrupted twice. But being interrupted is exactly what Jesus came to earth to do. And if we think about it, a place where Jesus may be speaking to us is in the interruptions to our daily lives.

**SERMON**

This morning’s Gospel about two healings, puts flesh on St Paul’s teaching that following the example of the generosity of Jesus, we are to do what we desire to do and complete what we start, according to our means.

The woman and the leader of the synagogue could not have been more different in their outer circumstances, yet they have one thing in common. Both the woman and the man are desperate.

The woman, who is suffering from hemorrhages is an outcast. She is unclean and having spent all her money on physicians, who were able to do nothing for her, she is penniless. Being unclean, the woman should not even be on the streets, let alone dare to touch the clothing of a man, a man who is not a relative. The woman is totally out of line with the social norms of the time. But she knows what she wants: to be healed. And she is determined to get what she wants.

The man in the story, Jairus, is prominent, a leader of the synagogue; he is well-educated and well-off. Jairus is accustomed to getting what he wants when he wants it.

But now, like the woman, Jairus is desperate too. Jairus is so desperate that he seeks out the controversial teacher, Jesus, whom some in the synagogue are calling blasphemous for speaking about God’s kingdom and baptizing for forgiveness of sin.

The desperate woman touches Jesus’ cloak and “Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed.” Jesus feels that God’s power has left him, and wants to know who touched him. The disciples say there is no way to know, the way the crowd is pressing in on him.

But the woman knows that she is responsible, and she, “Came in fear and trembling, fell down before Jesus and told him the whole truth. Jesus said to her, “’Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your disease.’”

It is significant that Jesus calls the woman “Daughter,” for a woman may only touch a man who is a member of her family. Jesus is protecting her with a word.

The woman knew what she desired --- healing. She had hope and faith that she could be healed, so she touches Jesus, and even though she fears she could be punished, perhaps stoned to death, she comes forward and explains herself. The woman completes what she started, using both faith and fearlessness.

Jesus denies that he has healed the woman, instead giving credit to the woman's own faith, and inviting her to go in peace and continue to be healed through her faith.

Dealing with the woman hasinterrupted Jesus. Dealing with her has delayed Jesus’ arrival at the home of Jairus to heal his dying daughter.

Just then some people come up to Jairus to tell him that his daughter has in fact died and Jesus might as well go home. “Why trouble the teacher any further?” they say.

Jesus will hear nothing of this, telling Jairus, “Do not fear, only believe.”

Jesus tells the crowd to go away, so that only Jairus and Jesus’ disciples Peter, James and John go to the house.

Upon entering, people laugh when Jesus says that the girl is only sleeping. Jesus sends everyone from the house except Jairus his wife, and the disciples. Jesus says, “Little girl, get up!” “And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about.”

Jesus wants to avoid further accolades for healing, and so he strictly orders the family to tell no one what has happened, which is very unlikely because the crowd was still outside the house and will probably stay there until they realize that the girl lives.

To demonstrate that the little girl is not a spirit, Jesus tells her family to give her something to eat. (Jesus himself eats after his resurrection to show that he is not a spirit.)

Jairus, who had been desperate, is amazed. Yet Jairus had never wavered in his desire for Jesus to lay his hands on his daughter and heal her. Jairus did not tell Jesus to hurry up, to ignore the sickly older woman. Jairus did not give up and say, “If my daughter’s dead, we can forget it.”

Jairus “Dwells in possibility.” Jairus, like the sickly woman, does what he desires and completes what he started. He too is fearless.

Jesus appreciates that the woman is honest and forthcoming and that Jairus shows empathy for the woman and does not pull rank and insist on Jesus’ going to his daughter without delay.

These are good stories for Lauren and Ben to hear on their Confirmation Sunday, as they have made their own vows to follow Jesus, and in so doing, they are to act on their desires, using their God-given gifts, completing what they start, according to their means.

Blessings on Ben and Lauren --- and on us all.

Amen.

**\*HYMN OF RESPONSE**

Our Hymn of Response is a hymn of hope: “O Love That Will Not Let Me Go.”

**West Center Congregational Church**

**United Church of Christ**

101 Pondfield Road West

Bronxville, NY 10708

914-337-3829

westcenterucc@verizon.net www.westcenterchurch.org