

Lead with a Servant's Heart

11th Weekend after Pentecost

SERMON BACKGROUND STUDY

August 11 & 12, 2007

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Matthew 20:25-28 (NRSV)

²⁵But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. ²⁶It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant,²⁷and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave;²⁸just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

Hebrews 12:1-3 (NRSV)

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, ²looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. ³Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart.

1 Corinthians 10:13 (NRSV)

¹³No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

What kind of leader are you? What kind of leader was Jesus? In this four-week series we'll talk about how we can all learn to lead like Jesus.

We are all asked to lead. Sometimes in a large organization. Sometimes in a small group. Among a group of friends. Or in our family. All of us are called upon to influence the behavior and thinking of other people with whom we are seeking a shared goal. Leadership is inescapable. We all lead and we all are led.

Jesus led.¹ In leadership-speak, Jesus formed a team, showed them a vision of where they were headed, and taught them how to get there in everything he said and did. But even for Jesus, leading wasn't easy. His disciples were often confused, blind to the larger picture, unable to understand or live out what Jesus was trying to teach them – at least until after Jesus was gone. For then, over the next decades, Jesus' disciples, now apostles, spread across the Mediterranean world, building for the kingdom of God.

Ken Blanchard of *One-Minute Manager* fame (see the page two text box), set out to learn more about Jesus' leadership from the four gospel accounts. Blanchard writes, “I realized that Christians have more in Jesus than just a spiritual leader; we have a practical and effective leadership for all organizations, for all people, and all situations.” Perhaps so. It is certainly a provocative claim, but may neglect the distinctiveness of the Church and the work of the Holy Spirit in a world filled with people who are at best apathetic and, at worst, hostile to God as revealed in Jesus Christ. Still, we can learn a great deal about leadership from Jesus. We just have to be ready to be surprised . . . as surprised as the disciples.

Wishing to serve

Jesus' leadership began with the heart, not the head, not even the hands. A humble heart. A giving heart. A serving heart. Today's passage from Matthew is taken from the last days before Jesus' crucifixion. Two disciples, the brothers James and John,² the sons of Zebedee, get their mom to go to Jesus and ask that her sons get elevated among the group so that they can sit at Jesus' right and left hands in the kingdom.³ When the other disciples hear what had happened, they are understandably upset and go to Jesus, who seizes the teaching moment. The Gentiles may lord it over one another, Jesus says, each seeking to rise higher

¹Jesus was led as well, as he sought to follow his Father's will in living out the vocation given him by his Father. Jesus prays at nearly every turn in the gospels. Great leaders know how to follow well also.

²New Testament names can be confusing. This James didn't write the book of James in your New Testament; that was the half-brother of Jesus. Nor is it likely that this John wrote the gospel. 41.5% of Palestinian Jewish males (as opposed to Jews living outside Palestine) bore one of nine names – hence the problem of potential confusion.

³It wasn't unusual for Mediterranean mothers to seek status and prestige for and through their sons. Here again we see at work a culture built around honor and shame.

than the next, but that is not to be the way of Jesus' disciples. They are to emulate Jesus, remembering that they are to serve, not be served.

This isn't about being nice or even helpful. It is about putting the interests of others ahead of our own (remember Phil. 2:1-11 from last week), even when that means substantial sacrifices from us. Blanchard writes, "A heart motivated by self-interest looks at the world as a 'give a little, take a lot' proposition. People with hearts motivated by self-interest put their agenda, safety, status, and gratification ahead of that of those affected by their thoughts and actions." The question Blanchard asks is pretty much the same question Jesus asked the brothers James and John: "Are you a self-serving leader or a servant leader?"

Likewise, the writer of Hebrews (see the page 3 text box), sometimes referred to as the Preacher, points us toward the example of Christ. Even when we tire or lose heart, we are to, as John West puts it, "keep on keepin' on" for Christ, our model and our hope. Jesus endured, setting aside humiliation and shame, always keeping his eye and his heart on the goal (again, back to Philippians 2:1-11).

Ego

Ken Blanchard has a clever way of creating helpful acronyms and charts. For example, he asks whether our ego gets in the way of our faithful obedience. Does our ego "Edge God Out?" Do we allow ourselves to be driven by pride and fear? Pride pushes us toward the promotion of ourselves, at the expense of others. Fear pushes us toward the protection of ourselves, again at the expense of others. In their self-promotion before Jesus, the brothers James and John revealed their prideful desire for status and recognition.

Or . . . will we seek an ego that "Exalts God Only." Will we embrace a life built on humility rather than pride and confidence rather than fear?

Blanchard suggests that trading one EGO in for the other is a matter of (1) embracing an eternal perspective⁴, (2) seeking to lead for a higher purpose, (3) carefully assessing our own faith and trust in God, and (4) seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit. All this is sound advice that has been taught and modeled by Christians for two thousand years. Blanchard and Hodges even suggest a twelve step program to move from Edge-God-Out to Exalt-God-Only patterned on Alcoholics Anonymous! That may seem a tad cute, but Blanchard and Hodges are right to see that many of us have nurtured egos that get in the way of our

discipleship and joy. Perhaps, a twelve-step EGO Anonymous program actually would help.

Lead Like Jesus

This year is the 25th anniversary of the publication of Ken Blanchard and Spencer Johnson's *The One Minute Manager*. It has remained one of the most popular books on managing people in organizations. A reviewer on Amazon recently wrote, "For an adult to have not read this book, to me, is like a person who never read 'Green Eggs & Ham' or 'Jack and Jill'." That may be a bit of overstatement, but there is no denying that *The One Minute Manager* is one of the best-selling and enduring business books of all time.

Ken Blanchard recounts how, after the phenomenal success of his first book, he began to feel God's pull. It took a long time, but Ken eventually turned his life over to Jesus and, being a behavioral scientist, found himself reading the gospels with an eye to Jesus' leadership style and methods. The result of his reading was the popular book, *Lead Like Jesus*, which he wrote with a long-time friend, Phil Hodges. This book too has proved to be very popular and is the inspiration for this sermon series.

Community

Paul's aphorism from 1 Cor. 10:13 can be puzzling. Really? . . . God won't allow me to be tested in more than I can handle? I can certainly imagine events in my life that I'm not at all confident I could handle. Trading in one EGO for another won't insulate me from suffering and problems. I remember a sermon by a man whose long-time Christian friend had committed suicide. The preacher reflected on this text.

But it is important to know Paul isn't really speaking to "me." The "yous" here are plural. Paul is speaking to the community not to any one individual. It is in community that we learn to Exalt God Only. It is in fellowship that we learn the way of forgiveness and grace. Together, we learn how to lead with servants' hearts. And in all this, God is forever faithful. Paul Sampley writes, "With every test, the faithful, dependable God will make sure it is something you can collectively handle, or God will provide an exodus as in olden times." Amen.

⁴Your life is more than the time between your birth and your death and it is larger than the world you can see and touch right now. Christians are to have a very expansive view of God's reality.

The Letter to the Hebrews

Other than Revelation, no book of the NT seems more foreign to most Christian readers than the Letter to the Hebrews. And the reason is clear. More than any other NT book, Hebrews is steeped in the Old Testament world of temples, priests, and sacrifice. Since most of us don't know much about the Old Testament, we are puzzled by the writer's theology, illustrations, and allusions. Our understanding is made all the more difficult because we can't answer the simplest questions about the "letter." Who wrote it? When? To whom? In his *Interpretation* series commentary on Hebrews, Thomas Long gives us a good and colorful sense of the problems:

"Among the books of the New Testament, the epistle to the Hebrews stands out as both strange and fascinating. Unique in style and content, as a piece of literature it is simply unlike any of the other epistles. Though some of its phrases are among the best-known and most often quoted passages in the New Testament, many contemporary Christians are largely unacquainted with the book as a whole, finding themselves lost in its serpentine passageways and elaborate theological arguments."

For those who take ropes and spikes and torches and descend into the murky cave of Hebrews, there is much about this document we wish we could discover, but our historical lanterns are too dim. For example, we wish we knew who wrote this curious epistle. Even though many names have been suggested—Apollos, Barnabas, Luke, Clement of Rome, Priscilla, and Silvanus, to mention a few—the arguments are not strong for any candidate. We actually have a firmer grasp of who did *not* write Hebrews than who did, since on stylistic grounds alone, it is a virtual certainty that the apostle Paul did not pen this letter. But who did? The best answer to that question is the comment of Origen in the third century: "But who wrote the epistle, in truth God knows."

We also wish we knew more than we do about the recipients, the first readers. Were they in Rome? Jerusalem? Colossae? Were they Gentiles? Jews? A mixture? We can only guess at the answers to these questions. The one current geographical reference in the book, which mentions Italy, is ambiguous (see comment on 13:24). Early on, someone attached a title to this document—"To the Hebrews"—but whoever did that was probably just speculating about its original recipients and was as much in the dark as we are.

Moreover, we would like to be able to pinpoint the date of Hebrews, but we can only provide an approximate range. Clement of Rome appears to quote Hebrews in a letter written sometime near the end of the first century, so it had to be composed before then. Also, most scholars believe that the elaborate christology of Hebrews could not have developed overnight and would more likely reflect the theological activity of the second or third generation of Christians. Putting these thoughts and a few other bits and pieces of evidence together, most scholars make an educated guess of A.D. 60 to 100 as the possible span during which Hebrews was composed.

So we peer into the depths of the text unsure of who wrote it, to whom, from where, or when. Imagine being handed a book today with the comment, "Here, you may enjoy this. It was written in America or Russia or France, I'm not sure, by a Jew—or was it a Gentile?—anyway, it was written sometime between 1920 and 1970. Enjoy."

READING WITH HEART & MIND, AUGUST 12 - 18

Sunday, Deuteronomy 1:1-45 This book is cast as Moses' sermon to the people before they enter the Promised Land. It is a restatement of the Law and is foundational to the New Testament. The first two chapters tell the story of the people's journey from Mt. Horeb (Sinai) to the Promised Land.

Monday, Deuteronomy 1:46-2:25 The story of the peoples' wanderings in the Sinai wilderness. Could you tell someone else the basic story of Moses and the people from slavery in Egypt to their entering Canaan? Why is so much time here spent retelling the story?

Tuesday, Deuteronomy 4:1-39 Moses warns the people that they are to be obedient, living out the teaching and instruction God gives them (the Law). What dangers does Moses warn them about?

Wednesday, Deuteronomy 5:1-21 Moses restates the Ten Commandments. Take a few minutes and compare this list to that in Exodus 20. Any differences? If so, what might they mean?

Thursday, Deuteronomy 6:1-9 This is a very important biblical passage. A Jewish prayer, the Shema, begins with the words of 6:4. It is a prayer that Jesus would have learned and prayed as a boy. Why do you think this passage was so cherished by the Jews?

Friday, Deuteronomy 7 This chapter is about the Israelites being a chosen people. What do you think it means to be chosen? Do you think you have been chosen? What might be the downside of being chosen?

Saturday, Deuteronomy 8 This chapter is a warning about the dangers of prosperity. Why would such a warning be necessary?

Sermon Notes

Scott Engle's class, *Something More*, meets in Wesley Hall at 9:30 every Sunday.

If you are not a part of a Sunday morning class, we hope that you'll visit our class. It is open to adults of all ages. Whether you are new to St. Andrew or just visiting, the class is a great way to begin getting connected. If you have questions, you are welcome to call Scott at 214-291-8009 or e-mail him at sengle@standrewacademy.org.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

In their book, *Lead Like Jesus*, Blanchard and Hodges offer a few questions for us to consider:

- “If you are skeptical about adopting Jesus as your leadership role model, write down your reasons. What is it about Jesus that is causing you to doubt? What is it about you that is causing you to hold back?”
- “List three ways you nurture trust in your relationships.”
- “List two things you do that put trust in your leadership at risk.”
- “Think of a time when you lost trust in a leader. How did you feel? How long did it last? When did you forgive him or her?”
- “In which of the following situations am I most prone to put my own agenda ahead of those I lead: in my work? in my home? in my marriage? as a volunteer? Why do you think this happens?”
- “Think of a time when fear of rejection or failure prevented you from doing or saying something that might have helped a friend avoid an impending mistake. What excuse did you give yourself to justify letting your fears control your inaction? Was it worth it?”

Blanchard and Hodges suggest that pride and fear lie at the foundation of a faulty Edging-God-Out ego; pride leading to self-promotion and fear leading to self-protection. Do you agree that pride and fear are such fundamental problems? If so, how do we go about becoming less prideful and less fearful. If you don't agree, what would you suggest are fundamental barriers to servant leadership.