

# **SERVANT LEADERSHIP: THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS**

Mark 10:35-45

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16 November 2014

In this sermon series we have considered the stories of Huldah, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Nehemiah, and Sojourner Truth. We have looked at several qualities of leadership: persistence, the ability to speak the truth in love, even what that truth isn't popular, resistance to evil, the courage of conviction, fortitude, and the pursuit of excellence. We have honored the ministry of Jim Deitz, celebrated the 90th birthday of Dave Weaver, recognized the moderators of this church.

Now we look at the definition and example of leadership as embodied by Jesus. People expected the Messiah to be a leader, a political leader who would help the people shake off their oppressors, a military leader who would liberate them, a religious leader who would call everyone back to a strict observance of the law. Jesus instead brought a radically new kind of leadership into the world. Most leaders, believing their reputation depends, in part, on the company they keep, like to rub elbows with the rich and famous. Everywhere he went, Jesus sought out the lost, the forgotten, the ignored, the shunned, the broken, those most in need. The religious officials of his day became some of his most vocal critics because he refused to join them in lording the law over people. The law, to Jesus, was a means to an end, the end being love and justice. When the law can help people towards love and justice, when - for example - the law calls for care of widows and orphans - then the law is to be celebrated. But if the law is an obstacle to achieving a more peaceful world - when the Pharisees try to keep Jesus from healing on

the Sabbath - then Jesus urges that the law be put aside. It is the spirit of the law, the intent of the law that matters to him, not a mindless devotion to it.

Jesus saw himself as bringing about a glimpse of the kingdom of God, the reign of God, a new way of being in the world. The primary characteristic of that way of being is that it is nonviolent. So of course Jesus disappointed the people who wanted the Messiah to be a military leader. One cannot show God's way of nonviolence by using violence. Jesus wasn't going to form an army to fight the Roman Empire. Rather, as scripture says, he was on earth to show "a still more excellent way", the way of love.

Jesus was a political leader if by politics you mean a complete reordering of our economy. Jesus believed in the equitable distribution of goods. If someone has something and someone else needs it more, you give it to the other person. Whether that's bread, or a coat, or a pair of sandals. He had no interest in proposing a new political system. He simply lived his values in his every day life. This is ground-floor, rising-from-the people politics.

Much is made of the "perks" of leadership, whether it's the corner office, the stock options, the limelight, the prestige, the title. Jesus was uninterested. He says, "I came not to be served, but to serve." We sometimes sing a hymn that says, "won't you let me be your servant, let me be as Christ to you..."

Jesus was different than what everyone expected at the time, and Jesus' style of leadership is still jarring today. Jesus still shakes things up, turns things upside down, and reorders our world.

Servant leadership, which Jesus embodied, is leadership for the sake of the other, leadership that asks, "How can I serve you?", "How can I be of service?" and truly means

it. Servant leadership is unselfish, not concerned in the least with what we can get out of leadership, but solely concerned with how someone else can be lifted up. Servant leadership makes other people that they are important, that they matter. Many servant leaders never make headlines, but they make a difference in people's lives. Sometimes they make all the difference.

Some of you have shared with me stories of people who are saints for you - not perfect people, but people who inspire you to greater faith and service, or people who embody particular characteristics you want to emulate. In each case, these people whom we call saints are people who lift up those around them.

Some members of this church are looked at as saints by others. I know I will embarrass them to mention their names, but I think it's important if for no other reason than to realize that we are each being noticed, and we each have the opportunity to make an impact, just in the way we live our daily lives.

More than one person mentioned Jan Witzigreuter, saying, "She is the person I want to be. I watched Jan volunteer again and again in our women's circle meetings, quietly serving and helping, never calling attention to herself. Jan has showed me what it means to go to the places no one wants to go and do the things no one wants to do."

I received this by email: "Kelly, my saint recommendation is Thelma Morningstar. The main reason is when we had the transition from Rev. Bucey to an interim minister there was a lot of disruption in the church. Thelma was Moderator at the time. She received a lot of calls from members complaining about the interim minister. Somehow she held us all together during that difficult time."

“Judy Reich is so giving of her time, her wisdom, and her wicked sense of humor. She shows such grace in difficult times, and always seems to be doing something kind for someone else.”

“Dave Witzigreuter is all about giving. He has boundless energy that I so often see being used to help someone else. He is also an example of grace under pressure.”

Several people mentioned relatives. Pat Armitage nominates her Aunt Anna who helped raise her. This woman had been in a car that was hit by a train at age 16. It left her with a malady that caused her hands to shake uncontrollably. Despite this challenge, she nursed Pat, made doll house furnishings and was a marvelous cook. Pat also nominates her husband Nev who is a saint and a hero to her, saving her life numerous times when she hit diabetic lows, being an outstanding loving father and friend to many.

Margerita Gerborg also thanks her husband Bengt for being a true saint: kind, unselfish, loving and forgiving.

She wrote an email with many examples of saints in her life and also this definition of sainthood which she found, and which I really like: “A saint is someone through whom we catch a glimpse of what God is like, and of what we are called to be.”

In that light, parents are saints for many people. Judy Srail wrote, “Without question - my mother. Her humble, steadfast, consistent, unwavering, solid faith and witness are inspirational.” Cynthia Kitora says her parents put God first, instilling in their children that faith is to be at the center of their lives. They didn’t just talk about it, but lived it - a life of volunteerism and service which continues to this day. Cynthia says, “They instilled values that I rely on every day. But they also gave us humor, laughter, and lots of terrific memories.”

For Kathy Purks, it was her grandparents Charles and Ruth Blackmore who took her and her brother Scott to church, every single Sunday, encouraging them to become involved...and how happy they would be to see that they still are, as is the next generation in their family.

I appreciate those who submitted names to me. Time doesn't permit me to use all the stories in this sermon, but I do want to share just one more. This is a personal story Sue Kilbey shared with me, and I'm happy that she gave me the privilege of sharing it with you.

"I arrived in the United States from Canada many years ago with two children under two and a Christian husband who wanted to baptize our daughter at Bay Presbyterian Church. The minister came over to my home to interview us...I hid the wine and cigarettes, and after speaking to my husband and me, he mentioned he had to return to our home because I was comfortable talking about God but never mentioned Jesus Christ. My husband's faith apparently was OK...but mine was not. To be honest, Kelly, I was a little ticked off.

The minister said, 'I will not baptize Tracey because, Sue, you cannot answer my question about raising Tracey in a Christian home.' I was so angry for I had loved God forever and just did not understand this Jesus thing. He encouraged me to go to a small group at the church.

Apprehensively, I attended a meeting of perhaps 10 women where babysitting was provided. My kids both screamed all the way to the church and I was beside myself. As we went around the room introducing ourselves, I burst into tears and cried for over an hour...could not stop. There was no way I was going to return having made what I felt

was a fool of myself, but that afternoon every single woman from that group called me and said, ‘Sue...been there done that.’

I returned because for the first time in my life, I understood the love and acceptance of Jesus through 10 women who cared, and a remarkable leader named Glennie who simply would not give up on me. For several years she led me to the love of Jesus in such a nonthreatening way. I thought I had to earn his love but she taught me about grace. Glennie simply loved us. She didn’t expect anything from us. I will always love her for she taught me that we don’t have to earn God’s love, we simply have to accept his phenomenal grace.”

Servant leadership comes in all shapes and sizes. Sometimes it begins and ends at home. Sometimes it calls us to places like India. It calls medical professionals to risk their lives helping those with Ebola. Sometimes it calls us to provide babysitting so that others can learn more about God. Sometimes it calls us to care more about employees than the bottom line. Sometimes it’s more about an attitude, a “how” than a “what” or a “where.”

We can find examples of saints in our church family, in our circle of family and friends, in history, in the Bible. We carry with us the example of Jesus, who could have sought fame and fortune, who had the ability to be a superior military or political leader, but who, instead, listened to God’s call in his life and was true to himself. It is his legacy that we seek to emulate, the legacy of service, the path to rewards we can only begin to imagine.