

Sermon September 20, 2015 - Pentecost 17

## Servant of All

Mark 9:30–37



Introduction:

Dear Friends in Christ, grace and peace to each one as we gather on this day in Word and Worship.

The Gospel lesson for today is the basis for our meditation. There Jesus teaches us that “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and

servant of all.”

We have heard that many times before, haven’t we! That we are to be servants, “servants of All.”

In his treatise on the Freedom of a Christian, Luther says that “A Christian man is the most free lord of all, and subject to none; a Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to everyone.” Yes we are to be “servants of all”

But today I would to focus our meditation and our servanthood from a leadership point of view.

A while ago here at Church we had a workshop on leadership. And on that workshop we learned that all, all of us are leaders in one way or another. Leaders in our own environment, at home, at school, our friends, at church but most of all we are our own leaders.

But as someone has pointed out, there is a “widening chasm between what we want and expect from our leaders and what we are getting.”<sup>1</sup>

Some have even proposed the idea that there is no need for leadership because “there is no need to manage adults” they “have the knowledge and the answers within themselves.” There is “No need to teach others how to think, behave or conduct themselves.” But experts say that that thinking is “is naïve. We know from experience that people do not always act in their own best interests.”

Human studies have shown that we all take our cues not from the realities of the environment, but from our own biases, desires, perceptions, and distractions.”

Now, I want you to ponder on this fact: If we all are leaders and take cues from our own biases, desires, perceptions and distractions, imagine where we are heading to, a disorganized, visionless and hopeless world in all strata of life, including religion and faith. We see that in the dealing and business of the world, from politics to family issues. But, we are not heading there, we are there already! When we allow our biases, desires perceptions and distractions to be the elements of our leadership, we allow for the world and all is trends to mold us into agents that propagate what the world is preaching, and what is worse into a bigger mess that stands on shifting sand. We do rally for a better and modern world. Modernity has been achieved. Times have changed, dear friends but human needs haven’t. And those human needs require a change in leadership, not just in thought or ideas, but change at the core of who we are.

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<sup>1</sup> Marchita R. Stanton, in Servant Leadership

Therefore we need to be changed leaders, leaders that will stand on that which is the truth, the life, and the way.

But for us to be changed leaders we need to stand on those attitudes that prove to be good traits of leadership, especially us Christians. These traits are: Commitment to our faith and the Kingdom of God, echoing what Jesus said to His mother at Temple, when she thought he was lost, he said: "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49)

The next trait is **Control** of what we take in, there is a lot of falsehood around that has the appearance of being the truth, remember we live in world of relativism that has thrown absolute truth out the window.

The next is **Challenge**. We don't normally like challenges, but I think that we are to view those challenges as opportunities to develop skills and learn.

And lastly **Connection**: have a connection with the most elemental aspects of faith, Word and Sacrament buy also with others in the faith for help and support.

Those are important aspects of leadership. But still, even when we think we have those aspects, our leadership sometimes becomes like the world of view of leadership that we expect to get something in return. Like the disciples in our Gospel reading, they wanted to be great, actually the greatest. We want places of honor and respect.

Isn't that what the disciples were doing? As they make their way following Jesus, on the road they were arguing amongst themselves who was the greater. (vv 33–34) but when Jesus asked them what they were arguing amongst themselves, as if caught with something bad, they did not answer, because really what was been uncovered was their pride.

At times, we too exercise leadership for pride's sake don't we! And I some ways we argue the same as the disciples, even if all we do is talk to ourselves. Our pride asserts that we are better than others.

We measure ourselves by things that make us look better than others. Like the disciples, we have the wrong idea of greatness. That is the typical style of leadership that we learn even in school, colleges or universities, sometimes under the disguise of equality, freedom of conscience or simple economical and leadership opportunities, even at home we are instilled the idea of pride and greatness, not according to God's word but the views of the world.

But in today's Gospel reading we learn something else, that our leadership needs to be marked by service, by an attitude of servanthood not of superiority.

That's Jesus instruction, his word that need to pay attention to. Something the disciples missed. As you see Jesus was first explaining to them what was going to happen to him, his death, his passion and his resurrection. That alone should certainly have set the tone for any further discussion. But from what follows, it's obvious that the disciples did not understand Jesus' words, they were concentrated more in their own pride and what being a disciple, a leader would bring them, what gains they were to get, what greatness they will achieve.

But Jesus shows next the true measure of greatness. Whoever would be first, Jesus says, "must be last of all and servant of all" (v 35). Now how does being a servant look like?

Jesus says a servant leadership is seen in the way you receive a child. And just how you would receive a child? How would you treat a child? Well it depends, right? It depends on whose child is this and the mannerisms of the child. I mean there are children who you just love having around, but there others you want them to be a hundred miles away, because they can prove to a handful and don't have the energy or the will to deal with them, the problem is that we don't know many times why they are like that, maybe they have been rotten spoiled, or maybe they are sick, or who knows. Yet children are children and we should love them for being children. And Jesus says, not just because they are children but we are to welcome them in His name.

The Gospel tells us: Jesus "took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them,<sup>37</sup> "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me."

But what does this have to do with leadership? This is the point: a good leader, a truly great one would just as gladly serve a child as lead a band of men, even a nation. Not looking for gain; not even because of pride, but in humility and respectful treatment of others, that's how you receive a child and that's how you lead yourself and others.

Receiving a child in the name of Christ, leaves no room for pride, for the true greatness is found in how the "great" one serves others. That is to say, true greatness is in humility.

Our human leaderships are not always in service and humility, are they! In fact we can identify some kinds of leadership that are not so good.

The first, I would call it the arrogant leadership, "I dictate you do." A leadership that is based on command, you give the command and expect others to do what you want, without any regard for the others.

Second, a leadership of "my way or the Highway," this a leadership that same as the above, but when the person doesn't get his or her wishes or desires abandons commitment, family and friends, even the community, on the account that desires are not ben met.

Lastly, is the "do as I say not as I do" type of leadership. We are prone to preach to others but we ourselves do not practice what we preach.

But Jesus on the other hand, is not just merely the greatest Teacher who would sit with his disciples and tell them what to do, but he will do it himself, he taught us that to be great we must become servants, and to be great leaders we must became leaders in service.

Jesus lived it out as he came to serve you and me, and the greatest service He could offer us was to give his live on our behalf. To die in our place! To pay for our sins! And now to be our continual attorney before God the Father!

He was submitted to the schemes of evil men. They killed him. He suffered the ultimate physical punishment: slow and painful death. Jesus on the cross is the last of all men.

But what he suffered is the indication to be the Servant of all. His life is offered as a ransom for the whole world. His life is offered as a ransom for your sins. That's how Jesus came to serve you and me, that's how he came to serve all.

And the good news today is that if you have realized that may you have practiced or suffer from a leadership based on pride, or if your leadership has been arrogant, or

“my way or the highway”, or “do as I say not as I do” leadership, all of that is forgiven, taken away, and a new style of leadership is given to you, through the forgiveness of sins.

After all in your baptism you have made into a new creation, enabled to be good servants, good servant leaders.

“Now” Paul tells us “this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. <sup>18</sup> They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. <sup>19</sup> They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practise every kind of impurity. <sup>20</sup> But that is not the way you learned Christ! ... Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbour, for we are members one of another. <sup>26</sup> Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, <sup>27</sup> and give no opportunity to the devil.... <sup>29</sup> Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. <sup>30</sup> And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup> Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. <sup>32</sup> Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

How can we do that? Because of Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit we can. For the Servant, Jesus Christ, has set us free. Free to be a servant leader here at church, at home, in your school, your community, and your own leader. You are certainly a changed leader, not like the rest of the world but a leader of different kind, a redeemed child of God first and enabled to be so as you lead yourself and others.

That’s what the world needs today, that’s what your family, your community, your school needs today. Can we become agents of change then? As we lead that’s what our goal should be, that we be catalyst of change in our community, but for that we need to be changed beings first. We can’t expect others to make changes for us, but we can expect change to begin within each of us.

In Christ, if you are a leader servant, dear friend, you are exalted, reflecting the glory of the Son of Man. In Christ Jesus, you are joined to the Servant of all, the greatest in the Son of Man’s dominion. In Christ you can be a servant to children and to men, leaders of children and men, welcoming all in the name of Christ.

Conclusion:

In Christ, the saying does certainly come true. Servant to none. Subject to all.  
In His name, amen.