

"Leaders Who Serve, and Servants Who Lead"

One of the most disconcerting parts of this political scene during the race for The Presidency is that dilemma of choosing between electing a real leader, one who will solve our problems and lead us out of them, or electing a genuine servant, one who understands the everyday people and our concerns, one who will speak for us, give us a voice and really care about us.

If you have been listening as I have, you may feel frustrated as I do. This is a false choice! Sometimes we need a visionary, and sometimes we need a people person, but to have to choose between the 2 is to deny the authentic spirit of leadership. Real leaders serve the people, and genuine servants will lead the way when they demonstrate compassion and care.

Undoubtedly, we are in a crisis of Leadership as our American culture becomes Global, growing in population, and shrinking in size and resources. We need Leaders more than ever and we need them now! What kind of leaders will we seek out for today's needs, and where will we look?

The church is no exception in her need for Leadership, both kinds. Without leaders who keep their heads when all others around them are losing theirs, we flounder. Church leaders need not be glamorous superstars, but simply stand strong for the principles and practices that have consistently kept us in God's will. They are often heard to say, "Here is the way. We must go this way!" And sometimes they must say, "We don't do that here as Christians!" Those leaders are true servants.

Then there is the other side. We Christians will not stand the test of fellowship with God or with each other, if we do not have servants among us who dependably, assertively and

compassionately reach out to meet the needs of our own and of those around us, that is, if human need is ignored for something perceived as more important. And those servants will be leading all of us to respond the same way, either leading by example or by building means for us to share in these acts of service!

Thankfully, as Christians we do not have to face that false dilemma. In following Jesus we have both **a Savior who cares** for every need and **a Lord who leads** us in the paths of righteousness. These are not exclusive of each other. In fact we cannot call Him Savior if we aren't willing to follow Jesus as Lord. And we cannot or will not follow Him as Lord, unless we have experienced His Saving grace. Jesus is the model for leadership.

And the leaders of our congregation are set aside today to lead by serving and to serve by leading. **The model is Jesus**, the one who preached peace from Galilee's seashores and the same one who fiercely cleansed the temple. The one who humbly went about doing good, healing the sick, raising the dead, and yet rode into the capital city of Jerusalem on the Passover Celebration allowing the townspeople to recognize Him as their king. What a Double Agent for God! **Serving and leading!**

The scriptures in Acts teach us that the calling forth of congregational leaders as deacons was done at a crisis time when the needs of people were so great that these got in the way of the Apostles ministry of the Word of God. Two critical needs were evident, a need for the basic necessities of life, food, clothing and shelter, and the need to hear God's Word proclaimed and applied. The needs were for both body and soul to be fed! Neither could be neglected, waiting for the other to be satisfied, or for the leaders to switch hats and attempt the other needs. They were just swamped!

Here is an important lesson learned then and crucial for a healthy congregation today. **FIRST** and foremost, **we need trusted and skilled leaders in The Lords' service, ALWAYS.** And this must be something the church **must always be preparing for.**

The Apostles did it this way, setting aside those who had 4 qualifications. These were, **#1, to be of good reputation,** respected people. We know from Paul's writings to Timothy that this means one who manages their own household well. In those days that meant everything from a decent marital relationship, if married, respectful children, if children were a part of the family, and a responsible family business or craft, since such in those days were managed out of the home and family! There is no mistaking what 'good repute' meant. This was not just to be influential in the community. This was a strict test for a deacon servant or a congregation was asking for trouble!

This is not always a comfortable call to make in selections, but it represents a discernment that must be exercised. Sometimes fine people who may be capable deacons must just wait a while until, all things being equal, their lives are settled and stable, and the opportunities are provided. *"To whom much is given much will be required."* So to be selected in this way or not, does not restrict a person's opportunities to serve the Lord and the congregation. As you have heard me say already, *"Do not wait to be asked!"* I believe if your life has been blessed, The Lord is already providing places of your needed and essential service for His glory.

A **SECOND QUALIFICATION** is to be full of the Spirit of God! Although that may seem like a subjective call, this evidence can be abundantly clear, as we read in **Joel** last week. *"Visions of God's Glory, dreams of where God is directing, and a good word ready to be offered"* are the stuff of the confidence evident in a spirit-filled person following Christ today. And since the Spirit is

abundantly available to all who call on the name, evidence of the Spirit is evidence of one who boldly is calling on the Lord and for the guidance necessary for a life dependent on His spirit.

A THIRD element to seek is **WISDOM**. I like this qualifier, because this one qualifies the other 2. The landscape of every kind of leadership is covered with people who are full of ideas about what we ought to be doing for God's Glory. But wise directions come from wise decisions which come from wise choices. The Lord had many a prophet whose messages were delivered against the grain of human reason or popularity, but for those who could see through the well trained eyes of devotion, these were all wise and godly choices.

For example, when **Abraham** received the covenant of God's promised greatness, not leaving home was just not an option. If Abraham would become the great nation promised, he had to go seeking the land of milk and honey; he had to leave the comforts of home. A tough decision to be faced only by a tough person!

Moses led an eager troop into the wilderness happily after God's promises, until food ran out, and patience, and confidence, and belief! Nothing like a good wild party around a golden calf to make the restless natives forget all of their troubles. But Moses, strained and weary from the overload of responsibilities, was driven to the mountaintop to receive further instructions. Had they lost their way? Had Moses lost his mind? Would God offer further instructions? You bet God would, and Moses, the leader and visionary, was shored up for the next tough round of the journey of obedience, and that left ½ of the thousands of disobedient travelers dead in the pathway. It was costly leadership that they needed and that Moses gave.

"Wisdom cries out from the streets," **Solomon** of the Proverbs announces. *"If any of you lack wisdom, ask of God, who gives*

liberally!" says **James**. When we discern wisdom within a life of a fellow Christian, it is no mere set of skills acquired by training, nor something transmitted through the genes. It is the bequest of God, who gives liberally for the good of His church and for His own Glory. It is never given for the pride and benefit of the one blessed. We must learn to discern that good practical wisdom mixed with the abundance of the spirit of God, and call it forth by setting a person aside to serve the Lord as He leads.

There we have the beginning of the qualifiers of deacons to lead by serving and serve by leading us. Again, these are: **a good reputation, evidence of The Spirit of God, and good wisdom**. I believe there is one common feature that makes these possible for anyone, and one that God seeks when giving these strengths. That one characteristic is **RESPONSIVENESS**.

If one is responsive to human need they gain **wisdom** from God about serving and solving these needs. Worriers never get the job done, nor do gossipers, handwringers or armchair critics. Wisdom says, " *I can't hold all these burdens! Somebody's got to do something, and that somebody must be me!*"

I had a young household handyman, Britt Elrod, in my former church. He was not the brightest star on the horizon, but his heart was good as gold, and his willingness to help was making of him an indispensable and tireless servant of the church. They made him a deacon and Building Committee Chair. He and I used to joke about how that must have been to test his new found faith! For every Sunday was a test at first!

When he came to church each Sunday, he said the members were lined up in the parking lot to talk to him about some leaky faucet, or a SS class left dirty, or some cracks in the sanctuary wall. Finally he came to me just broken. He said, "I can no longer

worship here. I had been robbed of my place as a regular worshipper seeking the Lord by all the desperate housewives!"

We finally came up with a solution to allow him to just be a regular churchman on Sundays, but not until we had a good laugh over his suggestion to raise a big sign over the entrance door to the church saying, "If you Found it, you fix it!"

CONCLUSION

Wisdom comes to those who ask & to those who can laugh, too!

- *Responsiveness to needs around us will make us wise
- *Responsiveness to God will keep us asking for His Spirit.....
- *And Responsiveness to our community will keep us aiming at a good reputation.

Above all, we can expect our leaders to be responsive , but we. must also teach every one of those within this body HOW to live that way with God's help!

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