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"Lead On"

Isaiah 49:1-7 John 1:29-42 I Corinthians 1:1-9

INTRODUCTION TO ISAIAH 49:1-9

Isaiah shares with the people of Israel about his call and his despondency about not getting the response he desired. So now God has expanded his call for Israel to be a "light to the nations," so that God's salvation can reach the whole world.

INTRODUCTION TO JOHN 1:29-42

In this morning's gospel lesson, John the Baptist follows up his baptizing of Jesus by pointing some of his disciples to Jesus. These are the first ones to follow Jesus' lead. Hear the word of the Lord from John 1:29-42.

Let's pray.

Lord you have called us to follow you. You have called us to be your servants, to be a light to the nations, and to tell of your goodness to all. As we read about how you sent your Son to call people to follow him, may we hear him calling us to follow as well.

Good leaders are hard to find. I thought you might enjoy a few excerpts from actual military fitness reports taken from the files of the British Royal Navy and Marine Corps. Here is how they evaluated some of their recruits:

"His men would follow him anywhere," says one evaluation, "but only out of curiosity."

"He would be out of his depth in a . . . puddle."

"He is technically sound, but socially impossible."

"This man is depriving a village somewhere of its idiot."

"This officer is really not so much of a has been, but more of a definitely won't be."

"This young lady has delusions of adequacy."

"She sets low personal standards and then consistently fails to achieve them."

"This officer should go far and the sooner he starts, the better."

"On my last report I said he had reached rock bottom. He has since begun to dig."

These would not make good leaders. This morning I want to invite you to think with me about leadership styles. It's an important theme in business circles today. It's an important issue in church circles. What style of leadership is best for a new year that is being born? Jesus called disciples to follow him. How did he choose to lead?

KING HEROD GAVE US ONE MODEL FOR LEADERSHIP. By his subjects he was called Herod the Great. But that was because they had little choice. Herod was the king of a small territory consisting of Judea, Samaria and Galilee. He inherited his throne from his father who had been appointed by the Romans to keep a tight rein on these contentious people called Jews. Herod was a petty tyrant and a petty man. He was about 73 years of age when the magi came to him with the news of an impending birth of a king of the Jews that wasn't him..

When the magi from the East came to his court to see what they might learn about a mysterious star they had been following Herod instructed them to return to him when they found the child they were seeking. When they didn't return Herod flew into a rage that resulted in Herod ordering the slaughter of all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity that were two years old and under.

Herod was an insecure man, a rigid man, an intolerant man. All Herod knew was the rule of force. He was a bully, a dictator, a despot.

There are leaders like that in the world today. Some of them lead nations, some of them lead businesses, some of them lead churches, and some of them lead families. That is the only way they know how to lead is by abusing others. They like to make sure that others abide by their rules no matter how petty those rules may be.

Here's an example of that type of leadership. It all began a few days before Christmas. Two employees of an electrical cable plant in New Jersey donned red Santa Claus hats and wore them to work. It was a harmless enough act, perhaps a simple gesture of holiday spirit. However, a plant manager noticed the hats and called for them to be removed. They were "inappropriate for the workplace," he said. The next day, in what became a symbolic show of support, 100 coworkers of the two original hat bearers arrived at work wearing red Santa hats. Not to be outwitted, the manager suspended all the employees. It took the intervention of the union to get the hats off and the employees back to work. The case went to arbitration. The arbitrator's finding was insubordination by the employees.

"This is a tale," notes Joline Godfrey, a person who studies workplace behavior, "of rigidity run amok, a tale of a control freak with too much authority and too little comfort with self or others." (1)

That sounds like Herod: "too much authority and too little comfort with self or others." That's one style of leadership-insecure, intolerant, inflexible, and dictatorial.

Do you believe in that kind of God? Some people have a really messed up picture of God in their minds and hearts. They have a picture of God that doesn't vary too much from this profile of Herod. Their picture of God is of one of whom they live in constant fear of offending. For them God is a god whose disapproval

is deadly and whose punishment is swift and without mercy. Some religious groups paint a picture of this kind of God.

There is **HOWEVER**, another style of leadership. It's called Servant Leadership. Servant leadership is the opposite of Herod's approach to things. Servant leaders identify with the people whom they lead. They do not lord it over them. Instead they are willing to get their hands dirty working alongside their people. The reality TV show Undercover Boss highlights this type of leadership.

Businessman Harvey Mackay, author of the book Swim with the Sharks, tells about such a servant leader, Philip Pillsbury of the Pillsbury milling family. Mackay notes that the tips of three of Philip Pillsbury's fingers are missing. That's the mark of a journeyman grain miller, notes Mackay. "(Philip) Pillsbury had an international reputation as a connoisseur of fine foods and wines," Mackay says, "but to the troops, his reputation as a man willing to do a hard, dirty job was the one that mattered . . . and you can be sure everyone was aware of it." (2)

Jim Wallis, editor of Sojourner magazine is that kind of servant leader. We are told that Jim actually takes home a smaller paycheck than the shipping clerk, because the shipping clerk has more mouths to feed. The decision to develop a salary schedule based on need rather than position was based on the "Leadership in servanthood" model. I doubt if many corporate leaders will take servant leadership that far. But it is a fascinating concept. The thinking is that today's better educated workforce cannot be pushed, it must be led. You don't lead by coercion, but by example. You drive cattle, but you lead sheep.

You know where I'm leading, don't you? Who was the greatest example of servant leadership who ever lived? Jesus. He stepped down from the throne of heaven and dirtied his hands with the affairs of humanity. The tips of his fingers are not missing like Phillip Pillsbury's, but Jesus' servant leadership is exhibited in the scars left by nails in his wrists and from the spear in his side. It was exhibited when he took a towel and a basin of water and stooped to wash the feet of his disciples before he shared his last meal with them.

Servant leadership is the kind of leadership that Jesus exhibited to those first two disciples the day that John the Baptist pointed Jesus out and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" Those two almost immediately brought one more. They grew to 12. They have grown to millions-millions who now follow this suffering servant leader.

Last night we celebrated the life of a servant leader, the Rev. Wendy Bailey. It was so inspiring to hear of the many lives she touched in the very diverse arenas. People spoke eloquently of her influence in their lives, whether it was through the churches she served, the presbyteries she served, the Baytown Little Theater she served, the young people who flocked to her home that she served, the chaplain to the motorcycle gang she served. It was a privilege to hear their

stories and then to share in a reception served by those who so beautifully exhibit servant leadership in our church-our Member Care Committee.

We heard our now retired General Presbyterian the Rev. Mike Cole share about the installations he had participated in with Wendy. This morning we will participate in installations of 2 more servant leaders Margaret Boyd and Jimmy Martin.

Tomorrow is a National Holiday honoring a man who exercised Servant Leadership. The night before he was assassinated Martin Luther King Jr. spoke these words.

"Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people will get to the Promised Land. And I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord."

King also wrote, "The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state. It must be the guide and the critic of the state, and never its tool. If the church does not recapture its prophetic zeal, it will become an irrelevant social club without moral or spiritual authority." (3)

God is not a God of whom we need to live in fear. God is not an insecure dictator, an intolerant tyrant. God is pure, unlimited, unbounded love. There is nothing but mercy in God. We can approach God like a loving parent in confidence and joy and in the assurance that God will never turn us away.

There is much we do not understand, but God is a God of love, mercy, hope and peace. God does not coerce by force, but leads by the example of love, the love showed by Jesus Christ upon the cross of Calvary. If you want a leader for your life, if you want a Lord for your life I can recommend no one better. That is true leadership. To Jesus, and to people who follow his example of servant leadership we say, "Lead on."

Let's Pray. Dear Lord, you sent your servant John to bear witness and point others to your Son who came to be the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world including ours. His salvation reaches to the ends of the earth. He taught as one with authority; his wisdom enlightens our way. He was bruised for our sakes and intercedes on our behalf. He served others as a sign of your love; and he offers hope to all who are in need.

We pray for those who are beset with burdens too heavy to bear. Draw them up out of the pits of desolation and depression. Set their feet again on solid ground. May they find in Jesus a sure foundation for their lives.

WE pray for those who face death and for those encumbered with sorrow at the loss of one held dear. We pray for the family of Dorothy Johnson that they may find comfort in your Spirit in the loss of such a loved one. May they rest in the conviction that in Christ, life shall not end.

We pray for the sick and those weakened by pain. As Jesus worked wonders, making persons whole, may we in Christ's name surround the infirm with healing ministries of comfort and care. Let our comfort convince them that they do not suffer alone. Let our care provide for their dignity despite their conditions.

We pray especially for Josh Higginbotham and rejoice with him for the news of his healing and look forward to having him worship with us again soon.

We pray for ourselves and for those offering prayers on behalf of others. May we be those who not only Come and See but Go and Tell what we have seen. .

1. R Contemporary Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, & Writers, Craig Brian Larson, ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1996), 230.
2. Contemporary Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, & Writers, Craig Brian Larson, ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1996), 230.
3. Martin Luther King, Jr., Strength to Love, 1963