

10-18 Lords and Leadership Mark 10:35-45

Kristen and I walked a corn maze yesterday. With my advanced GPS skills, I led us in circles. Kristen said, would you like for me to try? And we found the stations we were looking for. Sometimes leadership emerges in ways you wouldn't predict.

Prior to the American Constitution, no civilization had ever been governed by its people. It was widely believed that citizens were incapable of governing themselves. They needed a monarch. Royalty loved this, of course, claiming their rule as a divine right. While many colonists wanted freedom from English tyranny, many also feared anarchy. They said, one tyrant was better than thousands.

I asked our resident historian Dr. Culclasure, to help me with some research here. He said that he would provide some quotes as long as I made it clear that he had not provided the sermon. Here are some things John Adams had to say about the challenge of freedom and power.

The only maxim of a free government ought to be to trust no man living with power to endanger the public liberty. (1772 speech)

The fundamental article of my political creed is that despotism, or unlimited sovereignty, or absolute power, is the same (whether) in a majority of a popular assembly, an aristocratical council, an oligarchical junto, and a single emperor. Equally arbitrary, cruel, bloody, and in every respect diabolical (Letter to Jefferson, 1815).

Leadership, in other words, is often found far from power, and that's where Jesus is going in today's passage from Mark 10.

Jesus wanted his disciples to be **servants, not lords**. Usually, we assume that Jesus wanted his followers to be servants because he had a long list of things that needed to be done. But is this the only reason Jesus called us to be servants? To get more out of us?

Or could Jesus have sent them down the path of service for their own good? Did Jesus know something about the power of servant leadership that we don't seem to get?

The most important persons in a kingdom other than the king, sat at his right and at his left. **Joseph** likely sat to the right of **Pharaoh** because he was second in command of Egypt. Here we see James and John maneuvering for the number 2 and 3 positions in Jesus' kingdom. I'm sure the other disciples were thinking about it, but these two were sons of thunder so they weren't waiting for anyone else. Maybe they had latched on to what Jesus said about "**ask anything in my name and it will be done for you.**" They were asking! Yet this was an example of the disciples not receiving.

Had a friend in Waco who rose up the ranks in banking and became a president in his mid-30's. A difficult decade later, as he looked back on that rise to the top office, he told me it was the worst thing to ever happen to him. He said, *it ballooned my ego. It made me impossible to live with. I acted like a CEO at home too. I became a problem church member and a lousy friend. I thought I could do whatever I wanted to do. Once you're coronated and people follow your orders, you start believing that everyone should do that. **Being a ruler was a road to ruin for my friend.***

To address the misguided quest for status by James and John, Jesus said something very counter-cultural. He said something that did not fit any kingdom the disciples had ever heard of. He said something they couldn't comprehend. Beginning in v. 42...***You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you;***

but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.

If I were to write a modern paraphrase of this response by Jesus, it would go like this: *You know how things work on Wall Street. Everyone is trying to get rich so they can live the good life. They convince themselves that they have their client's interests at heart, but what they are really doing is using people to achieve their personal financial goals. In many cases, they find covert ways to lie, cheat and steal from their clients and customers.*

You're not going to seek wealth and power that way. You're not going to use your gifts that way. You can't love people and use them at the same time. Plus, you can't handle ruling power. When you become a lord, regardless how small your kingdom, it makes you a different person; one that is infinitely more self-centered. That's why I've told you that you need to be a servant that loves people. That's the only way you can hold on to humility and the only way you can truly bless others.

The phrase "lord it over" in v. 42 means ***to bring under one's power, to subject to one's self, to subdue, to hold in subjection, to be master of or exercise lordship over.*** The second phrase in that verse is sometimes translated ***they exercise authority*** is more correctly translated that ***they are tyrants*** over them. It is *excessive authority* being described.

Jesus made one thing clear in this passage. He wanted his disciples to be servants like him rather than rulers like the Gentiles. Could it be that **servanthood is the only posture from which transformative leadership takes place?** What if being a servant is essential for our spiritual growth AND for the spiritual growth of others?

We now have abundant psychological evidence about what domination does to the psyche of the dominated. It is true that some people can survive even brutal domination and emerge as stronger people. Nobel Laureate **Elie Wiesel** comes to mind. He lived through Nazi concentration camps and work farms to become an artist, author, intellectual and advocate for peace. But he is well-known because he is exceptional. Most of the time, being lorded over creates sad and tragic stories.

Jaycee Dugard's photo has been published on the cover of People magazine. She's smiling. But the jury is still out about what her life will be like after all those years of being subjected to mental and physical abuse and captivity. Being abducted, molested and held in a backyard prison for 18 years produces scars.

We know that the most common outcome for people who have experienced the psychological and physical trauma of being enslaved or subdued by power; is that they become perpetrators of power. They find a way to reverse the roles.

Another reaction to tyranny and power that is used to subdue you, abuse you or frighten you into submission is of course, **PTSD, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder**. Those who suffer from PTSD experience sleeplessness, nightmares, anxiety attacks, addictions, depression and explosions of anger. A study about the post-slavery experience of African Americans in this country reveals the longevity of this psychological pain. It can be passed from generation to generation.

In the kingdom of Christ, there is no domination and the suffering that goes with it. Followers of Jesus are called to spiritual transformation by way of serving others in Jesus' name.

German author, **Herman Hesse**, wrote a story of fiction called *Journey to the East*. It is about a group of people who were members of a timeless and expansive religious sect known as *The League*. This group was taking a journey to the east to find ultimate truth. They have with

them a servant named **Leo**. Leo tended to the animals; prepared meals; organized and responded to the needs of the journeymen.

Everything went smoothly for a time and the men didn't recognize how the happy and handsome Leo was holding the band together; until he was gone. The group slipped into disarray and bickering and eventually gave up the journey.

Years later, one of the men met Leo on a park bench but did not recognize him. A friend encouraged the man to write a letter to Leo because he was still upset that Leo had abandoned them. He wrote the letter and the next day, Leo arrived at the man's house and reported that he must appear before the High Throne and the officials of *The League*. When he came before the throne, who should be sitting there but Leo the servant who was in fact the leader.

Robert Greenleaf uses this story to speak about the nature of the servant leader. The best test of servant leadership, he says, is **whether or not those being served become better persons**. Do they become wiser, freer, healthier and more self-sufficient; and most of all do they become more just and loving? Greenleaf's thesis is this: *caring for persons, the more able and the less able serving each other, is the rock upon which a good society is built*.

Sadly most leadership in this country lacks the soul of the servant and most service is not mutual. Therefore, those served become more dependent, not less; less capable not more. When those served do not become servants, they are robbed of dignity, strength and value. This is a failure of leadership and service.

We have for centuries followed a leadership model suggested to **Moses** by this father in law, **Jethro**, who suggested that Moses build an organizational pyramid beneath him; a hierarchical division of labor cascading down from Moses who would be President/CEO and Chairman of the Board. Moses took this advice and so have millions, invoking it as a biblical model of organization and leadership.

How did that work out for the CEO; the man on top? As a matter of fact, God fired him and he didn't get a bonus. Why? Because Moses decided he could act for God. In striking the mountain to get water, Moses acted like he was a god. Imagine that from someone who has thousand of people beneath him.

Did Jesus know this about the nature of power? How it is a heady wine? How we are never satisfied with how much we have. We always want more until the power corrupts, brings us down and makes life miserable for others.

Only servant leaders strengthen the people around them. Only servant leaders surround themselves with equals who can hold their authority in check.

12 ministers and theologians joined 12 psychiatrists and psychologists for a seminar on **healing**. The host began by saying that while their professions were different, healing was common to them all. Why did we enter these healing professions, he asked? What is our motivation? What followed was only 10 minutes of discussion before consensus was attained. Ministers, theologians, physicians and therapists; Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, all agreed they had chosen their vocations for their own healing.

Do you want to be well? Do you want to be spiritually transformed? Do you want to empower others and help them grow? Be a servant. It's the only way we move toward wholeness.