

SERMONS FROM ST. MATTHEW'S

KINGDOM LEADERSHIP

Philippians 3:17—4:1

As a pastor, just like the senior person in any organization, I receive a constant stream of flyers advertising the latest book, video, conference or curriculum on leadership. If I were to take advantage of all these opportunities I would have to spend all my waking hours learning how to lead, rather than leading. In a self-esteem and power-driven culture, most of what I receive has to do with marketing myself and my ideas. There are 10 steps, 7 secrets, 5 hidden mysteries, 12 principles and at least 15 keys to growing my leadership IQ. And from there we go into the specialty literature pertaining to my particular situation as a church leader; which, of course, begs the question about how leadership in the church is supposed to look.

Just this past week I had to proof read the *Kiddie Link* article of our Director of Christian Education. Jill wrote the following, which well describes the concept of Christian leadership.

“The most difficult aspect of studio classes are the demos. For two hours you sit, huddled around the instructor, trying to take notes while she demonstrates a technique. Yuk! Even when the technique is something I’m really excited about, after an hour I start to get restless.

“But, on the occasions when I’m handed a text to read or have had only a verbal explanation, I generally fail more. By watching my professors, I note not just all they are saying, but also am able to observe all the unconscious actions that make the process a success.

“Before Jesus sent out his disciples he modeled the attitude and behaviors he wanted them to have. He prayed to his Father in front of them. He healed the sick. He taught those interested in his message. He didn’t say, “Now I want you to go out and teach and heal. Here’s a manual. Read it on your way.”

“Believe it or not, he didn’t just give us a manual and expect us to go to it. The Bible is our manual, so to speak. It gives us an account of who God is and what our relationship to him is to be. He has expectations of how we should act if we claim to love him and trust him. But he has also given us people in our lives to model after...all the historic saints like St. Augustine of Hippo, modern day saints Elizabeth and James Elliot. Look to the men and women God has placed in your life already as mentors.

“The other side of the coin is that our children are watching us. They are learning how to love and share Christ by what we are doing (or not doing). I can order my boys to be generous with each other, but if I’m hoarding chocolate bars my words are empty and useless.

“Christ has called us to follow him. What you need to remember is that while you are following him, your children are following you. Right into the arms of their loving Father!”

This is the same message that we hear from St. Paul in this morning’s reading from the Letter to the Philippians.

“¹⁷Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us” (3:17).

Leadership in the Church is not a matter of imitating the manner in which worldly leaders exert power and influence in their institutions and among their constituents. Rather, leadership in the Church comes through being a faithful conduit of the truth, passing the message from the source of truth downstream to those who have not heard it. If we believe that Jesus is the head of his body, the Church, then like a physical body, the parts can only function as well as they are connected to the head. The true leader of the Church is Jesus Christ and we can only lead effectively when we follow him.

Leadership in the Church is not a matter of hierarchy, but of interdependence. The Church functions like a group of people trying to follow a rescue worker out of a damaged building without lights. The rescue person who knows the way out links arms with the first person on line and then each person links arms with the next person until all are linked together and able to lead one another out to safety.

When St. Paul calls on the Philippians to imitate him, he is not being arrogant, but obedient. His message is “follow me as I follow Jesus.” It is not that St. Paul, or the leaders of your church, have any secret knowledge, special ability or are otherwise superior to you in the eyes of God. It is just we are dedicated to hanging on to the hand of those who are hanging on to the hand of Jesus. Again, St. Paul wrote:

“^{17b}...observe those who live according to the example you have in us” (3:17).

Throughout Lent we are providing an opportunity for you to do just that. Our theme is “Follow me.” During our Wednesday evening program we will be hearing from people who have answered the call of Jesus. Each speaker will share with us how he or she answered Jesus’ call to himself and then how that led to a specific ministry. Last week, Dr. Julian Linnell of Anglican Frontier Missions gave us a handout entitled, “Discerning a Call: A Prayer Worksheet.” I commend that handout to you and have made it available in the narthex and on the church website.

All of us are called to follow Jesus.

All of us are individually called to a specific ministry which is integral to the function of the whole Body of Christ.

The question is, “How are we to recognize what our path of obedience to God’s will is?”

St. Paul's answer is Christian leadership. Follow those who are following Jesus. As Jill reminded us in her newsletter, little eyes are watching you regardless of where you are headed. If for no other reason than to give them a break, dedicate yourself to following Jesus.

Let us pray.

Father, we give you thanks for sending us your Son to show us the way back to you. We thank you for the faithful people who have followed you in the past and have served as examples to us of how we are to live. Help us to realize that it is your will that we serve as examples to those who come after us. Empower us to follow faithfully and humbly those who have authentically followed Jesus. Open to us the path of obedience that you have ordained for us to walk. May we glorify you and make you known to those you have placed in our lives. Amen.

Taken from a sermon preached by the Reverend Charles D. Alley, Rector of St. Matthew's Episcopal Church in Richmond, Virginia on February 28, 2010, the Second Sunday in Lent.