

"NOBLE OR IGNOBLE?"

Judges 8 & 9

The Bible is filled with story after story of great leaders. People like Moses, Joshua, Deborah, Nehemiah, Paul, Peter, just to name a few. And these leaders came equipped with their strengths and their weaknesses; with their good points and their not so good points; their bumps and their lumps and their bruises and their warts as well as their victories and triumphs. They were, what we would call, human beings.

In just a few minutes standing before you will be 12 Elders and Deacons who will be ordained and or installed to their respective office: men and women who said YES to the call to serve Christ and His church. Men and women who have gone through training and been examined by the session and who will, today, stand before God and before this congregation and make vows to what they believe and what they will do.

But as we know vows are nothing more than words if there is nothing behind those words; vows are nothing more than vowels and consonants and syllables if there is no substance behind what is uttered.

Being a leader, today, is not easy and then again, when has it ever been? Someone once said that the trouble with being a leader today is that you can't be sure whether people are following you or chasing you. (*Bits & Pieces*, February 4, 1993, p. 8)

Bruce Larson, in his book *Wind and Fire*, points out some interesting facts about Sandhill Canes: "These large birds, who fly great distances across continents, have three remarkable qualities. First, they rotate leadership. No one bird stays out in front all the time. Second, they choose leaders who can handle turbulence. And then, all during the time one bird is leading, the rest are honking their affirmation. That's not a bad model for the church. Certainly we need leaders who can handle turbulence and who are aware that leadership ought to be shared.

But most of all, we need a church where we are all honking encouragement.”

(Bruce Larson, *Wind and Fire*)

When you think about it Jesus Christ Himself gave us two ministry models that an effective church leader must give him or herself over to. And let me just say that these two models were not, they were not abstract concepts, but rather they were and are absolute **standards for leadership behavior**. Let's turn in our Bibles to these two models. First, turn to John 10:1-18: what model do we find? **The Good Shepherd Model**. And second, turn to Mark 10:42-45. What model do we find? **The Servant-Leader Model**.

Did Jesus have any leadership problems? You bet. “He often found it quite impossible to keep his disciples in good relationships with one another- and working together to accomplish his mission in the world. No matter how hard he tried to explain it, they never could understand, they never could envision the kingdom he described. He spoke of the kingdom of God.

They could only envision a human kingdom in which they would rule. Even at the Last Supper they were still arguing over who would be 'top dog,' Lk. 22:24. He literally had to die before they understood. Up until the very last they were still denying him, betraying him, complaining because he hadn't carried out HIS mission exactly as THEY wanted him to, Luke 24:21." (*What It Means To Be A Church Leader*, Norman Shawchuck, p. 14) But Jesus never gave up and He never gave in. He shepherd His people and He was the consummate example of what it meant and what it means to be a servant-leader, something we all could model ourselves after.

This morning's scripture passage is an interesting one to share when the theme is focusing on leadership. The book of Judges tells the story of a period of transition for the tribes of Israel. The age of great leaders like Moses and Joshua are over- they are dead. The age of greatness under the rule of David is yet to happen. So this was a transitional period for Israel where judges ruled.

We read in Judges 8:22, "the Israelites said to Gideon, 'Rule over us, you and your son and your grandson also; for you have delivered us out of the hand of Midian.'" Gideon refused to rule over them and in Judges 8:32 we read that Gideon dies. In Judges 9:1-15 we read that one of Gideon's sons, Abimelech, after listening to his mother's conniving words, kills 70 of his brothers but there is one brother, Jotham who survived when he hid himself. Verse 6 tells us that the lords of Shechem and all Beth-millo came together, and they went and made Abimelech king. And it is when Jotham is told that Abimelech is now king, verse 7, Jotham went and stood on the top of Mount Gerizim, and cried aloud and said to the lords a parable that I want us to focus on as it relates to leadership. But let me let you in on the end of the story that is found in Judges 9:53 and following- a certain woman threw an upper millstone on Abimelech's head, and crushed his skull. And in order so that people would not be able to say that a woman killed him he had his armor bearer thrust him with his sword and finished him off.

But back to what this passage has to tell us about leadership. Look at the parable again in verses 8-15. The trees wanted a king to rule over themselves and who do they go to? First they go to the olive tree- does the olive tree that is producing a rich oil and would be a good leader say yes to rule? NO. Then it is on to the fig tree who is producing delicious fruit and who would be a good choice to lead- does the fig tree say yes to rule? NO. Then it is off to the vine, but the vine is producing good wine- surely the vine will come through but does the vine agree to rule? NO. The olive tree, the fig tree and the vine all refused leadership. Why? It was the same in all three cases- **the cost was too much**. So they go to this scraggly old bramble bush and they asked him to ruler over them. What did he say, No like all the others? Wrong- he said YES. The least expected was ready to lead? Why? Maybe it was because he had nothing to lose, there was no cost to him.

I believe there is a lesson to be learned in this parable and it is this- **there will always be someone ready to lead whether it is a noble leader or an ignoble leader.** The noble leaders- the olive tree, the fig tree, the vine who could have, who should have stepped up and lead were not will, the cost was too high. The ignoble leader- the bramble bush, when no one else was willing to step up to the plate, did exactly what the others did not do. He said YES. Look at what he said to them in verse 15, "then come and take refuge in my shade; but if not, let fire come out of the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon." "Come and take refuge in my shade" was an invitation to them to come and be under him, and in "coming," he was going to take their freedom away. And if he couldn't take their freedom away he would just up and consume them. Great leadership, right? But that is what happens when ignoble people step up and lead when noble people will not.

When you think about the history of Israel, when you think about the history of the church, there will always be leaders. There were noble and there were ignoble kings of Israel. There were noble and there were ignoble leaders in the early church. The church is never without a leader, no matter at what level. The issue is when good and noble people refuse to lead there will be ignoble people who will. If noble leaders do not lead, someone else will. And so the question for those of you who are leaders, the question for those who will be ordained and/or installed today and on Sunday, June 22, the question for all of us who say YES to Jesus Christ is **what kind of bush are we?**

Let me take the opportunity to share some Biblical truths that speak to leadership:

1. Christian leaders should be certain that their goal is to serve God and others, not to receive the title or honor that comes with leadership.
2. Leaders should not use their position for their own advantage or comfort. No task should be "beneath" them- although some tasks may be delegated. They should not ask others to do what they are unwilling to do themselves.

3. Leaders will seek to distinguish their own preferences from the will and welfare of the group as a whole.
4. Normally the position should seek the leader. There may be some situations in which persons may apply or volunteer. Nevertheless, when someone strongly desires a particular responsibility, his or her motivation should be carefully examined.
5. We must learn to see each other as valuable to the Lord and basically equal in His sight. (Millard J. Erickson, *The Standard*, May, 1982.)

You who are in leadership- it is a high calling, it is a great honor, it is a great responsibility.

I leave you with my 4 C's for leadership and yet they can apply to any person who has said YES to Jesus Christ.

1. Christ-centered. If Jesus Christ isn't central to whom and what we are as leaders then there is no need to go any further.

2. Committed. It is one thing to say YES to being an officer in the church. It is another thing to be committed to the work you have been called to do. There are times that out of our commitment we might have to sacrifice something because duty calls.

3. Consistent. This is not a hit-or-miss situation. Either you are on the team or you are not. And with consistency there is something called follow-through. If you say you are going to do something do it, unless there is an extenuating circumstance that just would not allow you to do whatever it is you said you would do.

4. Christian love. We need to do the work of Christ with Christian love. There is probably no other calling in church leadership responsibility which exceeds this- that a person be an example of Christian love to those who have elected him or her to this position.

For those of us you who are being ordained and installed today; for those of us who have said YES to Jesus Christ, the question I want to leave us with today is are we going to be a noble leader, a noble follower of Jesus Christ or, are we going to be ignoble? Only you, only I can answer that question. Amen.

"NOBLE OR IGNOBLE?"
Selected verses from Judges 8 & 9

Introduction: The Bible is filled with story after story of great leaders

Interesting facts about Sandhill Cranes
Three remarkable qualities...

Jesus Christ gave us two ministry models:

First, John 10:1-18 **The _____ model**

Second, Mark 10:42-45 **The _____ - _____ model**

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Judges 9:8-15: The olive tree, the fig tree, the vine- all refused leadership. Why? **The cost was too much**

The bramble bush...

A lesson- there will always be someone ready to lead whether it is a noble or ignoble leader. What kind of bush are we?

Conclusion: 4 C's of leadership: **Christ-centered, Committed, Consistent, Christian Love**