

## Servant Leadership/Service

### Learning

First Presbyterian San Rafael  
October 20 2024

Leading from Behind

Mark 10: 32-45  
Rev Joan Smith

They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem; Jesus was walking on ahead of them. They were in a daze, and those who followed were apprehensive. Once more taking the twelve aside he began to tell them what was about to happen to him. ...the Son of Man is about to be handed over to the gentiles, who will mock him and spit at him and scourge him and put him to death, and after three days he will rise again.

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, approached Jesus. "Master," they said to him, 'We want you to do us a favor.' He said to them, 'What is it you want me to do for you?' They said to him, ' Allow us to sit one at your right hand and the other at your left, in your glory.' But Jesus said to them, ' You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I shall drink, or be baptized with the baptism with which I shall be baptized?' They replied, 'We can.' Jesus said to them, "The cup that I shall drink you shall drink, and the baptism with which I shall be baptized you shall be baptized, but as for seats at my right hand or my left, these are not mine to grant; they belong to those to whom they have been allotted.'

When the other ten heard this, they began to feel indignant with James and John, so Jesus called them to him and said to them,

**'You know that among the gentiles those they call their rulers lord it over them, and their great men make their authority felt.**

**2/ Among you this this is not to happen. No! Anyone who wants to be first among you must be slave to all. For the Son of man himself came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'**

**Service leading...from wherever you are**

**Jesus gives it to them straight. He has been living and teaching a new way of life, referred to as the Third Way.....being in a vulnerable, honest, loving relationship with the Holy...who can take them as they truly are!.. and with each other. Remarkable! The power structure is not top down, but circular! It assumes a different and direct relationship with the source of life, spiritual power...the Holy Spirit.....available to everyone, not controllable by Roman rulers or wealthy landowners or originating or mediated by traditional religious Holy Men. In a community that serves each other, as Jesus is trying to model....these new kind of leaders are more teachers, facilitators, compatriots... close enough to see and serve the needs of those drawn to this new way of life.**

**This is radical, so much so that even those closest to Jesus didn't get it. And how many of us squirmed reading Borg's latest chapter, stating that Jesus' "new way" was not only a different SPIRITUAL relationship directly with God. This new life was to be POLITICAL, for all the systems for work, ownership, law and religious rights had an unjust foundation that resulted in unnecessary pain and suffering for people at large. Both amelioration (making life better, feeding hungry, housing the**

poor, healing the limp) but also eradication (taking apart unjust systems and institutions such as criminal justice, inadequate low income housing) As the troupe crested the top of a hill a few chapters back, Jesus looks down on Jerusalem and exclaimed, "Oh, would that this were finished!"

3. In our century, this radical standard for servant leadership, was articulated in 1970, when Robert Greenleaf published his practices developed over years at AT & T. "Servant leadership begins with the natural feeling one wants to serve individuals and organizations.... The organization exists for the person as much as the person exists for the organization." This was not a popular idea at the time, and other leaders scoffed as he led AT T in hiring women and African Americans in non-menial jobs. My aunt Virginia was one of those women hired as a stenographer at AT &T in 1942. She was proud to get on the bus into the city, dressed up for work, after watching her own mother, my grandmother, work as a cleaning woman in the steel mills into her eighties. Greenleaf wrote that the test of servant leadership was "Do those served grow as persons? Are they healthier, wiser, freer, more inspired and able to be a servant to others? The daughter had escaped into a better life.

Let's return to the disciples. They follow what we've come to know happens in the Hospice process: denial and then anger...then bargaining. That's where the disciples are as we find them. And as Cynthia said last week, Jesus must be thinking....will they ever get it!..he manages at first just to respond to James and John's request for special treatment, following the old power structures wisdom...the first shall be the one who gets the worm!...then eventually Jesus gathers

**everyone together, saying with emphasis.... NO! I am not here just to be a leader in the old style....just a nicer guy, still lording it over everyone, making my power felt. I am here to make clear everyone has a built in connection to the Holy Spirit, a receptor for Life Energy, a capacity to learn how to open to it, care for it, help others . fully alive and loving. leading with vulnerability. That is the kind of leadership....a servant leader....focused on the needs and building up of those around you. That's the kind of servant leader you are to become!**

**What about us? Where are WE on the road? It's not fundamentally about the coming election, as important as that is. The IT, the fundamental changes, are already happening beneath our feet and out of our sight...but felt at a deep level. In a Feb 19, 2024 lecture on Youtube, with a dear contemplative teacher, Cynthia Bourgeault, I finally heard a clear reflection on this. She calls what we have been going through a disruption of our "happiness program" ...all those things we are attached to that we assume we must have to be happy, safe, good and OK. An antidote sometimes taught at Contemplative Outreach, written by Mary Mrozowski, and sometimes accorded to Thomas Keating, is called the Welcome Practice (or prayer). I have found this very helpful at times of profound unrest in our world. It is a way of loosening our attachment to things we assume we cannot live without, in the moment when turmoil has us in its grip. Mary created this, after much research into biofeedback and contemplative prayer with Thomas Keating and Cynthia Bourgeault.**

**Welcome, welcome (whatever our distress is creating such as fear, anger, etc) followed by one or more of the following,**

**depending on circumstances. (I usually invite the presence of the Holy Spirit in prayer)**

**I let go of my desire for power and control.....**

**I let go of my desire for affection, esteem, approval and pleasure**

**I let go of my desire for survival and security**

**I let go of my desire to change any situation, condition, person or myself.**

**I open to the love and presence of God and God's action within.**

**You can see why I've chosen to begin our worship with The Guest House poem. And I think you can also see, and feel, how challenging this practice is, made for challenging times like these.**

**in a religious community, most of us initially relate in one of four ways. One way gravitates to maintaining the traditions, rituals, sanctuary. A second way is an interpersonal bent, investing one's spiritual life in relationships, friendships, groups with others, pastoral care. A third person, of a more contemplative nature, relates through silent prayer or silent gatherings, in nature, and often sits near the back in worship. And a fourth way, although often not part of a church structure or worship, is being drawn as an activist to re create or improve unjust situations in the community. In times like our current upheavals, we are all likely to be called to stretch into less comfortable spiritual channels, in a crisis or through creeping familiarity. Stop and think before you holler, "wait, this is not what I do, or who I am!" Be on the lookout for doing the**

**unthinkable, the opposite of what you usually do. In critical times, even our favorite spiritual avenues have to be upended.**

**And then there are times when we just need to get outside of our heads and “spiritual thoughts”, move our bodies and get outdoors. At times of incessant unrest around us, remembering our relationship with nature and its profound connection with Life Force is imperative. This story almost qualifies.**

**One morning a year ago, after I had retired from Tam House and moved into a new apartment down the street at Rotary Manor, I woke up to a crushing feeling of grief. Who should I call? Where could I go? What can I do? I was desperate to get out of that awful feeling before it took me over. I lit my meditation candle and sat on the sofa facing a window and a redwood tree. I tried to meditate, but the feelings swamped me. At a little movement, I glanced to my right and noticed a squirrel trying to get cozy on a redwood branch. He kept backing his bushy tail up to the trunk, and trying to balance his body on the branch. His head would slowly start to drop, his eyes would fall closed then jerk open...off and on, he would lose his balance and jolt upright...and start all over again. I don't know how long or often we went through this. When he finally steadied enough to fall asleep on the branch, I truly felt like we both had accomplished something. My searing depression had evaporated. I was bright eyed and bushy tailed for the day. My squirrel was sound asleep.**

**Let us pray. May God's face shine upon you, and be gracious unto you. May the Holy Spirit fill you, strengthen you and soften you. May you always remember, no matter where you are, God is.**

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**References: Cynthia Bourgeault, Youtube Aspen Institute  
February 2024**

**Robert Greenleaf, Legitimate Power, 1977 (servant leadership)**

**The Complete Guide to Service Learning, Cathryn Berger Kaye**

**Margaret Wheatley, So Far from Home, lost and found in our  
brave new world, 2012**

**The Day the Klan Came to Town, B. Campbell, 2021**