

“Will The Real Leader Please Stand Up”

Dr. D. Jay Losher

23 September 2018 + Gaithersburg Presbyterian Church

Mark 9:30-37 = Leadership

Jesus' ears were burning ~ not because he had overheard the disciples talking about him, but because Jesus had overheard them talking about themselves!

They had argued with one another who was the greatest.



Like kindergarteners: when you hear some mischief brewing and if you ask preschoolers what they are doing, the answer is almost always: “Nothin’.” Yet Jesus had just heard them: “I’m the greatest.” “No you’re not, I’m the greatest.”

John: “Jesus said *I’m* the beloved one, you know.”

Peter: “But you were all there when Jesus picked me first.”

James: “But at the Transfiguration I was first up the mountain.”



They had argued with one another who was the greatest.

An argument over who was to sit on Jesus' right hand and who was to sit on his left when he came into his kingdom ~ an argument not over service and responsibility, but rather in terms of status and power. So childish!

“Don’t be so hasty,” Jesus responded, “My kingdom is not of this world, do you want a portion of my death?”

As usual the disciples were too lost in themselves to understand what Jesus was trying to say. So Jesus did an awesome unexpected thing. He took a child as a living object lesson, stood it among them, and said in essence those immortal words from *To Tell The Truth*: “will the real leader please stand up.”



Jesus is not saying that the disciples should persist in childish behavior. Nor does Jesus endorse arrogance and ambition, our childish behaviors? Quite the opposite,

“Not so fast, Peter, James and John.”

“Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.”

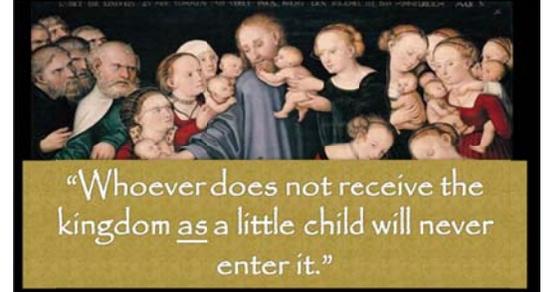


“Not you either, Bartholomew and Matthew.”
“Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.”

A short time later in Mark 10:15 Jesus explains himself further. Jesus explicates what qualities of leadership a child has:

“Whoever does not receive the kingdom as a little child will never enter it.”

Jesus is saying: Receive the kingdom with open arms, with whole heart and open mind as a child does ~ on faith. Then Isaiah’s vision will be fulfilled:



“The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.”¹

That “A little child shall lead” us into God’s kingdom is seemingly so uncomplicated and deceptively simple. We must ask: “What does Jesus mean?” What are the qualities of leadership which children offer, and those which Jesus would like us to emulate?

John Buchanan, former moderator of the General Assembly, retired editor of the *Christian Century* offers one answer to this question. Buchanan writes of his granddaughter Rachel’s response to worship. Rachel has Down’s syndrome and

“She finds sitting through a 60-minute service (with a long monologue by her grandfather) a bit of a burden. But she loves the Taize service, loves lighting and watching the candles, loves singing the melodic music and loves sitting in the silence. Learning to do that is something we all need to do.”²



“A little child will lead” us into God’s network by showing us how to worship God in spirit and in truth.

Randy Branson, a pastor friend, answers another part of our question. One summer his family was vacationing in the West and visited the

Donner Pass museum. Who would want to do that? Not your or my first choice, of course. Despite the gruesome subject of the tragic Donner expedition, Randy said that the museum was well worth the trip.

There were a number of surprises. For example, 70% of the women and children survived, but only

30% of the men. Many explanations might be offered for this, but one fact is prominent ~ an 8 year old girl survived. She not only survived, but was a hero, keeping spirits up, caring for others, even under those horrific conditions.

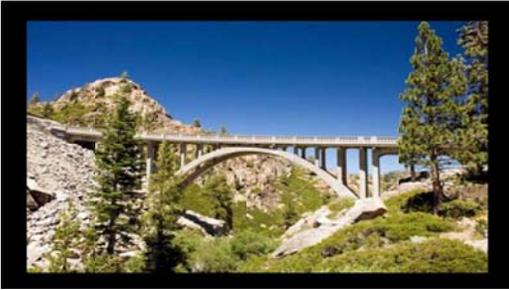
This young girl, with wisdom beyond her years had a doll. All her fears and anxieties she passed through her and into that doll. Thus she was able to remain calm in the crisis. That doll is displayed prominently in the museum.

“A little child shall lead you” Jesus says to us: a child can lead us through tragedy to triumph, just as Christ did on the cross.

Jesus in our text sanctions the disciples’ for their over-the-top arrogance and alludes to the coming crisis the disciples will have to face. Thus by offering a child as example, he pointed out that even the weakest have strengths. Even the poorest have kingdom riches. A child can lead us ~ by teaching us how to care and minister to others ~ to focus our anxieties and hurt ~ even and especially under the worst conditions.

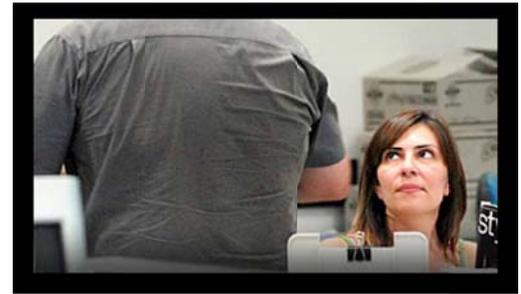
Jesus used this child as an example for the disciples, for us, in order to demonstrate that when the going gets tough, those with childlike faith not only survive but help others to survive. Indeed “a little child shall lead” us into God’ realm. A child can teach us faith, hope and love as defenses against grief, suffering and fear.

With all his talk about **“the first shall be last and the last first”** and “a little child will lead us,” Jesus is telling us in no uncertain terms that



leadership in the kingdom is quite different from what we expect leadership to be. Leadership in God's network is the reverse of conventional wisdom. A woman was talking with her pastor about her boss:

"He is the most capable boss I've ever worked with,' ... 'He is brilliant, energetic, everywhere at once, on top of every detail in the business, always enthusiastic, always there with the right decision.'



Then she paused and said rather reflectively, 'He is the worst boss I've ever worked with.'"³

A wise woman.

There are two kinds of leaders in the world, and in God's family: *transformational* and *transactional*. Jesus is explicit that he prefers the one scorned by the world. Social scientists define these two as:

Two types of leadership:
Transactional leadership
Transformational leadership

"transform[ational] leaders lead by drawing themselves and those with whom they work to deeper levels of moral consciousness and shared values."

"transactional leaders lead by exchanging favors with their followers."⁴

Let's face it. That woman's boss is a transactional leader. His main concern is not to help the employees improve their lives, but to please his own bosses, shareholders and clients. He fails at inspiring his employees to deeper levels of anything. Most bosses, most leaders in the world and unfortunately most leaders in God's church are transactional leaders.



It is easy to build a big church with entertainment, with trading favors, massaging egos, giving people what they want or at least what they think they want, and trying to please everyone. In the church most leaders worry a whole lot more about keeping everyone happy than helping people change, helping people become disciples, helping people advance in discipleship. With transforming leaders, Jesus promises us something more: faith, hope and love, grace, goodness and even more beyond.

