

Leading Like Jesus – February 1, 2015
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Leading Like Jesus St. Mark 6:34-44

We live in an era where leadership is determined by success. Those in the field of business are measured by the profit line. Those in the field of politics are deemed successful by the number of votes received. Coaches are gauged by their wins over their losses. In each of these cases, success often confuses rudeness with unconventionality. Most of us can probably illustrate each of these categories with leaders renowned for their merciless style of leadership.

For believers, Jesus is our example of successful leadership because he led with compassion. At first glance he was just a carpenter's son. He didn't attend Harvard or come from the rich and famous. Externally, there was nothing amazing about Jesus, and yet many left everything to follow him. Following his death and resurrection the embryonic church began and continued to grow, all because of his implausible leadership.

Why was Jesus' leadership so effectual? We understand the complete story so we see that it is the Holy Spirit's power in the incarnation that enables Jesus' life to be life changing. Even before his death and resurrection it was his compassion that moved people to follow him.

In the gospels, the miracles of Jesus were not meant to be magic shows, but were motivated by Jesus' compassion. It was never his intention to parade his healing arts. Usually, Jesus was involved in some work when he came upon a person in misery, and it was his empathy that compelled him to heal.

Compassion can be seen even in Jesus' teaching style. In our gospel lesson Jesus tries to take his disciples on a retreat for rest and reflection. Even there people gathered and when Jesus observed them, he had compassion on them because they were like people without a leader. Jesus then adjusts his agenda and teaches the 5,000 men (not counting the women and children), and shares a spontaneous meal with them, a different meal than the one he had planned for his disciples!

At the end of Jesus' physical life he continues to show compassion, even to his disciples who deserted him. Especially to Simon Peter the one who received the

most compassion. In this postmodern world the non-believing world understands compassionate leadership to be weak or soft leadership. Their anxiety is that if they show compassion they will be taken advantage of or, horror! lose control.

If, as believers, we think compassionless leadership is possible then our lifestyles will not differ from the non-believers. Perhaps because we are surrounded by a “Me-first” culture, compassionless leadership is sometimes found in the church. Throughout my years of ministry the most debilitating times have been those involving church leaders who lack compassion. I have seen this in requests for personal aid, use of church facilities, even in the manner committee members treat one another. Sometimes it appears that for the sake of church growth we are willing to sacrifice respect and caring for others. Jesus never made that sacrifice.

It is difficult to sustain effectual leadership in a society that does not respect or value compassion. We are inundated with leadership models. As believers however, we know that our model is Jesus. And to do this requires intentionality.

If we can recall our elementary school experience we discover the first step in compassionate leadership, the Golden Rule: Treating others the way we want to be treated. Jesus treated people much differently than they had ever been treated. His interaction with people was love and respect filled. People followed him, in part, because they had never been loved this way. As a result, they were loyal followers who in some cases, gave up everything to follow him.

We, too, are called to love God and our neighbor as ourselves. Without this love we cannot be compassionate leaders or faithful followers. Alleluia. Amen.