



Saint John United Methodist Church
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Message for July 31, 2022
“Lessons in Leadership: Setting a Right Example”
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: Nehemiah 5:14-19

A Class of His Own

Over the summer we have learned a lot about Nehemiah and his leadership. I hope you have been as challenged as I have been.

When it came to leadership Nehemiah was in a class of his own. He was a man of strong character and impeccable integrity. He always had the interests of others at heart. He was burdened for those he served. He placed a priority on people. Nehemiah never expected anything of others that he wasn't willing to do himself. In a word, Nehemiah led by example.

We see all these things playing out in a wonderful passage from Nehemiah 5:14-19. It speaks of the great leader he was. Let's read then Nehemiah 5:14-19.

Nehemiah 5:14-19

Moreover, from the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, until his thirty-second year—twelve years—neither I nor my brothers ate the food allotted to the governor. But the earlier governors—those preceding me—placed a heavy burden on the people and took forty shekels of silver from them in addition to food and wine. Their assistants also lorded it over the people. But out of reverence for God I did not act like that. Instead, I devoted myself to the work on this wall. All my men were assembled there for the work; we did not acquire any land.

Furthermore, a hundred and fifty Jews and officials ate at my table, as well as those who came to us from the surrounding nations. Each day one ox, six choice sheep and some poultry were prepared for me, and every ten days an abundant supply of wine of all kinds. In spite of all this, I never demanded the food allotted to the governor, because the demands were heavy on these people.

Remember me with favor, my God, for all I have done for these people.

The Failings of Our Elected Officials

It should come as no surprise to you that we are a little over three months from the 2022 midterm elections. In some states the politicking is in full swing. If it's not, it will be. This is an important election. This election, just like any other election, puts those running front and center. They're put under a microscope. Their every word is scrutinized and otherwise analyzed. Many are caught saying one thing and doing another.

Our faith in our elected officials seems to be at a low ebb. We've all grown a bit cynical. There is way too much partisan politics, way too much grandstanding, and way too much speaking out of both sides of the mouth.

Regrettably, we have grown accustomed to politicians profiteering from their positions of power. We have grown weary of all the double standards. We have grown weary of all the arrogance. We expect more from our elected officials, even though they, like us, walk on feet of clay.

An Uncommon Leader

We have noted throughout the entire summer that Nehemiah was an uncommon leader. He was a politician of a different sort. He was a man after God's own heart. He sought God's leadership at every turn and because of that became the sort of leader people had no problem following.

We mentioned earlier in this series that Nehemiah's political life, if you will, started with him being "*cupbearer of the king.*" "*Cupbearer of the king*" was a responsible position that gave him access to the king. Nehemiah leveraged that access not for his own gain, but for the good purposes of God.

Over time, Nehemiah became governor of Judah, serving a total of twelve years. During that tenure Nehemiah did everything in his power to do the Lord's bidding, particularly in seeing that the wall around Jerusalem was restored.

Nehemiah never wanted to profit from his position. He not only had God in mind, but the people he served as well. Nehemiah was the epitome of a servant leader. He sought to identify with the people he served. He didn't take advantage of his position and leave them wanting.

The governors who preceded him had placed heavy burdens on the people. That sort of thing was the farthest thing from Nehemiah's mind. The governors who preceded Nehemiah profited by expecting the people to give them food and wine on top of a substantial tax.

Even the servants of those governors took advantage of the situation by, as the scripture puts it, "*lording it over the people.*" Why wouldn't they? The governor was doing it, why shouldn't they?

The governors who preceded Nehemiah built a culture where the people served the leaders rather than the leaders serving the people.

As we have read through the Book of Nehemiah, we have noticed that he writes with a lot in the first person singular. He does that powerfully in Nehemiah 5:15 as he reflects on all the graft that preceded him. "*But out of reverence for God,*" he said, "*I did not act like that.*" (Nehemiah 5:15)

That's a good word for us. "*Out of reverence for God I refuse to act like that. I want to lead and lead well as God leads me. I will refuse the temptation to do otherwise.*" I am of the mind that people are inspired by that. People always have a way of coming around a leader with that kind of disposition.

Setting a Right Example

Leadership is best taught by example. If anything, we learn that from Nehemiah.

I had a professor in college who used to say, "*You never know where your influence will stop.*" Whether we realize it or not, we are always influencing those around us, whether for the good or the not so good. That's particularly true when it comes to your witness as a Christian.

I am constantly considering how what I say and do affects that witness. I don't want to do anything to mess that up, particularly with young people.

Chuck Swindoll tells the story of a three-year old who had learned to golf by watching his grandfather. The boy was so enthusiastic that the grandad wanted to show everyone at a family get together. The grandad gave the boy a golf club he had fashioned for him and turned him loose. It wasn't long before the boy was heard spewing a cuss word and seen tossing the club into the yard next door. Our kids are always watching.

Here's something to think about: who was a role model in your life?

Maybe it was a coach or a teacher, maybe a relative, someone at church, or quite possibly your mom or dad? Why were they a role model for you? What did they do or say that made them so special?

Here's something else to think about: how are you a role model in somebody else's life?

Paul writes to the church in Thessalonica, *"You became imitators of us and of the Lord despite severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so, you became an **example** to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia."* (I Thessalonians 1:6-7)

Servant Leadership

Our lesson in leadership for today is this:

A leader is all about setting the right example, the example of servant leadership.

- You can't rightly ask people to serve if you aren't willing to serve them.
- You won't get very far if you don't show you care.
- You aren't much of a leader if you are more concerned about your needs than you are the needs of other people.

Our scripture for today shares that Nehemiah regularly gathered those he was leading around a common table. He sat them a hundred fifty at a time. Nehemiah didn't charge them a cent. He was quick to pick up the tab if you will. He just wanted to serve them, and by serving them, he sought to honor them.

Some of us served dinner at Grace Kids on Wednesday night. It was an honor to honor the children there by serving them.

When it comes to servant leadership, there are all sorts of companies that tend to the needs of their employees. Those companies always seem to thrive.

I read just this past week about the CEO of Camping World, Marcus Lemonis, pulling their sponsorship of the Camping World Truck Series. He did that to take the money saved and funnel it to his employees during what are tough economic times.

Caring for the needs of others always has a way of paying dividends and is very much a part of servant leadership.

Rose was a poor woman who lived many years ago in Albania. She and her husband made a practice of opening their home to the poor and hungry of their town. Whenever one of Rose's daughters asked who the visitors were, Rose would reply, *"They are our relatives."* All along Rose's daughters believed they came from an enormous extended family.

One of Rose's daughters was particularly influenced by that. Her name was Agnes and grew to become an advocate for the poor worldwide. Agnes, otherwise known as Mother Teresa, was a living example of Christ's love in the world.

Christ Our Example

When I think of servant leadership I think of Christ. He too led by example. He is the epitome of all service and love. He is the greatest servant leader to have ever lived.

Jesus was the one who washed the feet of his disciples, and by doing so, demonstrated that in his Kingdom the ones who lead will be the ones who serve and those who are first will be last and those who are last will be first in his Kingdom.

Those who follow Christ come by that sort of thing honestly.

You and I are called to follow Christ, and in following him, to become more like him. Above all things, we are to be like him in expressing love toward others.

Paul writes in Ephesians 3:18-19, *"And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love may have the power, together with all the saints to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."* (Ephesians 3:18-19)

That love is what makes us tick as Christians as we seek to lead by example.