

Sermon Text for June 12, 2016

by Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Mark 10: 35-45, Genesis 37: 1-11

“Called as Servants”

Stacy and I were able to duck away for the day on Friday, we went to Atlantic City, no, not to gamble, but to spend an evening in Ventnor, walking on the beach and then seeing Bethany play basketball on Saturday morning. I spent 13 years in Ventnor and that area and it was almost surreal to see the place and see the missionary houses where we stayed torn down and these brand new houses taking their place just a block away from the beach. If you've ever grown up in a place and then come back to it decades later and it is different or gone, there is a real sense of loss, a real sense of sadness. I learned a lot growing up there. I was exposed to church leaders from all over the world there.

What does it take to be a leader? What does it take to be a leader in the community, in the church, in our families, in our schools, in all the walks of life in which we find ourselves? Early on before I became a pastor I learned from the President of Princeton Theological Seminary, Tom Gillespie, how to reflect a desire for real leadership. In all of our correspondence together he would sign his letters your servant in Christ. It always reminded me of Jesus' words here in Mark when he is speaking with James and Joh and foretells that they will die a death like he does. In fact, who is following the 90 Day Challenge saw on Friday that James was the first Christian martyr. Jesus tells them that whoever wishes to become great among you must become your servant. I hope we can learn to live that out daily as well. We live now in a time that the world and society desperately needs leaders who are servants, desperately needs people who are grounded in and committed to reaching out to others in generosity, kindness, and love as was reflect in our savior, Jesus Christ.

Our Scripture today in Genesis gives us the story of one who will become one of the most effective leaders in the history of the world. Now the key words are will become. Today he is merely a boy unsure of his leadership role and he makes a few mistakes. Let's read about Joseph and try to learn how we can all be leaders in our families, with our friends, in our community as we poke holes in the darkness.

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When we were in Russia we had a chance to spend a week in Egypt. There were too many experiences to share them all with you. But it really was one of the first times, besides the times that we went to Israel, where the topography of the Biblical setting really came to life. We drove from Cairo to Mt. Sinai, and it was absolutely barren. I couldn't imagine wandering in that area for 40 years. But it really heightened my understanding of what Moses and all the people of Israel went through in that land. Egypt is also at the center of where the person that we are going to be studying in Genesis through October finds himself.

Chapter 37 of Genesis really begins the Joseph story. And today we begin a journey together with Joseph. I mentioned last week that he is one of my favorite biblical characters, but he starts off slowly. It is a long story, the Joseph one, but one that we will see every week about how God shapes him and molds him from a know-it-all teenager to a mature servant of the living God truly serving others. It is in these verses when we read about the well known coat of many colors or as Broadway would describe it as the Technicolor dream coat. It isn't a bad portrayal. But think of who Joseph starts out as. He is a 17 year old tattletale who is spoiled rotten as most youngest children tend to be and he is given a special gift by God, and that is dreams that mean something.

Scripture tells us that his father loved him more than any of the other brothers and he wasn't very subtle in showing that special love for his son. He gives him an elegant, luxurious robe that Joseph is able to show off when he walks around. Now that the scene is set, Joseph doesn't help his cause any by sharing with them a dream he had, Joseph comes up to his brothers and says: "You won't believe the dream I had last night. We were all working in the fields and my bundle of wheat rose up way above yours and you all began to bow down and worship me. Isn't that crazy?" Needless to say it made his brothers so angry that they could hardly speak to him.

Joseph has another dream and he shares that one with his brothers and his father as well. "I had another one of those crazy dreams. But this time dad, you were in it along with mom, God bless her soul, and the rest of you brothers. I dreamed that the sun, the moon, and eleven stars worshipped me. Isn't that great?" You can understand why

his brothers wanted to get rid of him as quickly as possible. I mean, talk about an annoying little brother, Joseph would be the perfect example of that.

Joseph eventually becomes a great leader, but at 17 he had a lot to learn. He received from God at a very young age a very clear vision of what God wanted him to do for him, and he can't keep it to himself. Joseph is hated because of the very vision that God has given him. His brothers are obviously jealous and they are threatened by this vision that turns upside down the established order.

This church is filled with leaders. You are leaders at work, you are leaders at home, you are leaders in your community. As disciples of Jesus Christ we are called upon to act in ways that may not follow the established order. You will be called upon for a vision that you must follow or risk being disobedient to God. A leader is able to receive a vision, follow it, and make others excited about that vision. It isn't until later that Joseph learns how to make others excited about what God has placed in his heart.

The key to understanding how we can be leaders with a vision is given to us by Christ. He tells his disciples that he came not to be served, but to serve, to give his life as a ransom for many. Christ coming on earth allows us to not only use his example of how we ought to live, but actually give us a reason for living.

Jesus' message in Mark is counter-intuitive and certainly counter-cultural. Jesus says in vs. 43-45. Now, do you really get that message at training for corporate business or in any secular setting?

You know people are looking for meaning in life and if we are able to be examples in how we live and serve we can then point to Christ as the one who has shattered the darkness by his sacrificial act upon the cross. In his life Christ taught us to lead the world by serving it and not by looking down or lording over it.

What Jesus was able to do was give a certain message and power to 12 people who then were able to change the world. Joseph didn't learn yet how to empower, Jesus empowered to the point where people were excited to actually live and die for the vision of a new life that Christ would give them.

In our Scripture Joseph had a powerful vision from God but couldn't put it into action right away because he wanted to lord it over his brothers. Jesus had a vision for

what the kingdom of God should be like and he empowered people to work for the vision.

Like Joseph we must have a vision. I have a vision of this church where every single program would be geared toward making mature Christians that would then turn and bring people into the fold. I have a vision of this church that it becomes the heart of this region in such a way that no person is left out but that all who step through these doors understand that they are welcomed into the body of Christ. No longer can we be happy in just trying to maintain the sheep in the gate but the gate must be thrown open by us to allow the sheep to pour in.

You are the stewards of a vision that begins with the principle that we are servants to others, this vision will allow us to lead others to Christ. May God bless us and keep us as we strive to do just that.

Amen.