

**CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP**  
**Sunday, October 30, 2005 – Proper 26, Pentecost 24**  
**The Rev. Dr. Patrick R. Close**

What are the qualities of a leader? We live in an age that seems void of “great” leaders. We are nearing an election, and the campaign advertisements are tiring and obnoxious. All the candidates are more intent on pointing out the sins and shortcomings of their opponents rather than outlining their answers to pressing problems. The ads are meant to make us afraid of voting for the wrong person. Do our potential leaders offer so little that they can only resort to this type of approach?

What about leadership in the Church? Our Church is embroiled in a crisis today that I believe is more about power and control and less about theology. There are those who would demand that we follow only one narrow way that only they can define and only they can interpret. These struggles over the nature of leadership are not new. Every religious organization faces the same struggles and challenges. The question before us today is ... what constitutes a Christian leader?

At one of the earlier services today, I asked the children to tell me what they thought a leader was all about. I was amazed at the direct and simple, yet profound answers. One child said a leader is someone who others follow. Another said a leader is someone who knows where they are going. Still another child told me a leader is someone who makes us look at things we don't want to look at and find answers. How are those for responses?

But what does it mean to be a Christian leader? Are there other things that we must consider? Do we have a different way of doing things? A Christian leader is one who others follow. They are someone who knows where they are going. A Christian leader is not afraid of challenges. Just what else is there for us to consider?

A Christian leader is one grounded in the teaching and model of our Lord Jesus Christ. This leader looks at the world differently, through the loving eyes of God. The priorities and way of approaching matters is different. A Christian leader is grounded in God, acts out of Jesus' commandment to love and understands the role of a leader to be one of a servant. Perhaps if we look at our readings today we will begin to understand the different shape that a Christian leader takes on.

In the reading from Micah today, we are confronted with strong words about a group of prophets. The reality that occurs in this part of the Bible is that the people and their leaders have moved beyond what God expects and desires. They have lost what it means to be the people of God. Injustice and idolatry reign. God's ways are sacrificed in the name of human ways. It is into this world that God sends the prophets with their words ... return to God, or else! Micah was one of those prophets trying to bring the leaders and people back into a covenantal relationship with their God.

But there is a problem. The king has surrounded himself with what we would call “yes men.” These are the people who give the king the answers his wants to hear. Things haven't changed much, have they? The major difference between then and now was if the king didn't like what you said, you didn't just lose you job ... you lost your life! The

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prophets that Micah is attacking do not remind the king of his duties towards God or the people. They tell the king what he wants to hear. They are careful not to offer anything that would upset the king. The times that Micah lives in are witnessing tremendous injustice. Those people that God wanted taken care of are ignored or abused. The poor, the sick, the widows, the orphans and many others have no advocate. The king is failing to do his job.

It is into this world that Micah comes and says, change your ways or else! The prophets called the people of God to return to God. Micah challenges the people to give up their idols, to return to acts of justice, to worship God alone. Israel at this time had become a country interested only in luxury and self-absorption. The needs of the poor were forgotten. The needs of the widows and orphans were ignored. Consumption and material things were all that mattered. Micah spoke on behalf of God. He risked all he had, even his life, in order to speak out. Micah was a leader who counted only on the grace of God to see him through. To be this kind of leader took deep faith.

We jumped ahead to the time of Jesus. Once again, Jesus is confronting the religious people of his days. He points out how their words and actions don't match. Jesus says they are good at making rules ... as long as they are for others. The false leaders of his day are concerned with the "perks" of leaders ... the benefits of office. They like the best seats in the house. They like the status they have in the community. Jesus attacks those leaders who are concerned with status, power and control.

This is not the type of leadership Jesus calls us to either then or now. The marks of leadership that Jesus holds out for us are two ... humility and service. Underneath this leadership are God and the power of love. Jesus seeks those who love God to use their lives to serve others. He wants leaders who are less interested in furthering themselves and more interested in the welfare of others. The overwhelming call of Christian leaders is the way of love, service and humility grounded in God. This is the model that was held out to the first Christians and continues to be the model held out to us.

Later, we see Paul struggling with the Church in Thessalonica over the issue of leadership. Other leaders have moved in ... and one gets the sense that they were less concerned with proclaiming the Gospel and more with making sure they were comfortable and well cared for. Paul assails such attitudes. He reminds them of how he asked not for pay, but relied on his talents to provide income. Remember, this is the early Church and they did not have clergy as we know them today. Once again, the message is that a leader is one who focuses not on their needs first, but those of the community. Again, we see that only the years, the issue still remains ... what are the marks of a leader? Of a Christian leader?

The model is clear for us. It is as the children told us ... a leader knows where they are going ... a leader is someone others will follow ... a leader is one who makes us look at the difficult things. To this we add a leader is one grounded in God, a follower of Jesus

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Christ, one who puts the community first. The marks of this leader are the heart of a servant, humility and love. With these things, we can become the leaders the Church needs today. Equipped this way, we move forward carrying the Good News that not only our community but the world needs to hear.

Now we know what constitutes a leader, where shall we go? Who will we invite to follow us? How will we serve God? God has called us to be leaders, now is the time to act. It is time for us to join the roles of the leaders ... and to be part of that wonderful community that has built the community of faith. Good luck!