April 26/2014 Leadership

A leader is a person who shows the way on a common journey. Sometimes, a leader will show the way by: “going before, like a shepherd leading a flock.”

The most respected and effective leaders are grounded in humility. They possess authenticity and integrity and they have a clear vision for which they are consistent and persistent. We see examples of these leadership qualities in the Old Testament – Abraham, Moses, and King David. Although each profoundly affected Judaism and Christianity, they were also burdened with painful flaws in their public or private lives. The same can be said for more recent leaders like Mother Theresa, Ghandi and Nelson Mandella. From the plethora of transformational leaders over the past 2000 years, none can be said to have led without some inadequacies.

Only Jesus led without fault. His attributes of humility, authenticity and vision have vaulted over the centuries and remain as relevant today as ever!

Humility:

Jesus pointed out the importance of humility in His teachings. He did not emphasize strength and force to lead, but rather meekness and humility. He said to “bless” our enemies, to “pray” for them, to “do good” to them, (Luke 6:27) He said we should emulate the tax collector who “beat his breast asking for God’s mercy”. He said: “for anyone who exalts himself shall be humbled and he who humbles himself shall be exalted”. (Luke 18:14) During the Last Supper, He washed His Disciples’ feet, but perhaps His ultimate examples of humility were His last days.

He had called Himself: “The Son of God”, the Messiah, and yet He was flogged and beaten like a common criminal. He was abandoned and, alone, He dragged the cross through jeering crowds. Only a stranger, Simon assigned by the guards, toiled with Him to carry the burden of the cross. Jesus’s status, at that time, could sink no lower! But, He suffered silently and with humility and at the end He prayed that God would forgive their ignorance. I think Paul, the great leader of early Christianity concludes well in 2 Cor: 12: 9-11 - “that is why for Christ’s sake, I delight in weakness, in hardships, in persecution, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Authenticity:

In His teachings, Jesus refers to The Father frequently. He taught that to focus on God and not “self” would result in integrity – in truth and honesty. In John 3:21, He states: “he who does the truth comes to the light that his deeds may be made manifest, for they have been performed in God.”

He said to the Pharisees: “you are they who declare yourselves “just” in the sight of men, but God knows your heart: for that which is exalted in the sight of men is an abomination before God.” In John 7:18: He said: “he who seeks the glory of the One who sent him is truthful and there is no injustice in him.”

Jesus taught not only by word but also by His actions. What He said and did was in perfect harmony to who He was. He showed indignation to hypocrisy when He chased the money changers out of the Temple and overthrew the tables. He knew these actions would anger the Sanhedrin and initiate His demise but He believed the Temple was: “a house of prayer.” He lived His life with integrity and attracted followers with His truth and never through manipulation. He said: “If your eye is clear, your whole body will be filled with light.” (Math 6:22)

Vision:

Jesus’s vocation began with His baptism by John. Herod would silence John, but he could not silence Jesus. Jesus’s vision had nothing to do with an armed struggle against the Romans. He used the word of the prophet Isaiah to articulate His mission: “The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor.” He spoke these words in the Synagogue, and with multitudes staring in amazement, He said to them: “today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Jesus was remarkably consistent and persistent in serving His vision. He had that strong sense of purpose which characterizes great leaders and makes them restless if they are not working on their vision. There is always another mountain to climb!

In Mark 1:35, we can feel the energy and determination of Jesus when He could not rest, even after a full day of preaching. He said: “Let us go to the next towns that I may preach there also: for that is why I came out.”

For the next two – three years, Jesus travelled on foot preaching the good news and healing. He chose twelve disciples to share His task and instructed them not to accept money for their work: “You received without pay, give without pay.” (Matt. 4:24) He never lost sight of His mission, His vision for mankind. He was a Jewish peasant, yet His teachings encompass the world’s dominant faith, with 2.5 billion Christians. Clearly, the man may not be among us, but His vision and His Spirit live on.

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