

## What Kind of Leadership?

Exodus 3: 1-15

Matthew 16: 21-28

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Will you join me in a moment of prayer?

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts and minds be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Were you as shocked as I was when you heard that Jack Layton had died?

I realize that he looked really bad at his last press conference, but it was still a shock.

And I think it is safe to say that no matter what your political stripe, there was a lot of respect for Jack across party lines.

And those words, which have been quoted in the media and posted countless times on Facebook, struck a chord with Canadians in a way that I have not experienced previously.

*My friends, love is better than anger. Hope is better than fear. Optimism is better than despair. So let us be loving, hopeful and optimistic. And we'll change the world. (Jack Layton 2011)*

Those were words of a leader... and leaders are sometimes ahead of where the public is.

Much has been made of Jack Layton's United Church roots, his long time friend and United Church minister, Bill Blaikie, currently serving as an MLA in Manitoba wrote this:

*Jack Layton's light always shone for a more inclusive, loving, environmentally sensitive world. He dared to believe God's will could be done on Earth as it is in heaven if those who wanted to anticipate the kingdom and its justice pursued it with discipline and courage.*

*Canadian Christians, whatever their politics and whatever their disagreements might be, should recognize that in losing Jack Layton we have lost a great example of a public life significantly shaped by the church.*

*Jack ran the race set before him and fought the good fight. I am as sure as one can be in this life that the words "well done, my good and faithful servant" welcomed him into God's care and keeping.*

So, what does all this have to do with our readings today?

It's about leadership... it's about vision, it's about courage, commitment and compassion.

In the Hebrew Scripture passage, we encounter the adult Moses, not the baby in the basket, but grown up, married, a shepherd and in exile.

In between, he has grown up in the royal Egyptian court, but been nursed by his natural mother, and probably taught or absorbed some of his Jewish heritage.

As a young man, he had seen a Hebrew slave beaten by an Egyptian.

Reacting to the injustice of someone beating another who cannot respond, he intervened and killed and buried the Egyptian.

Word got out and Pharaoh saw Moses as a traitor.

Moses fled for his life.

In exile, Moses was welcomed into another culture, learned the art of sheep herding, married and started a family.

Then, one day, he has an encounter with God on a mountain...

An angel of the Lord appears in the flame of fire... burning bush... one that is not consumed in its fire... and a voice...

Can you imagine hearing the voice of God saying, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.”

I always imagine God’s voice as a deep masculine voice in this passage. I don’t know why, perhaps I have been influenced by the movie, The Ten Commandments.

How does Moses respond?

First of all, he says, “Here I am, Lord.”

But when he hears that God is going to send him to Pharaoh to lead the Hebrew people out of bondage and slavery, suddenly he is not so eager. And his response is, “Not me... I am just a simple shepherd...”

Moses responds in exactly the same way as I think many of us do when we hear or experience God calling us.

Eager to encounter God, but not so eager to respond to what God is calling us to do.

God can’t be calling me...

I am too old, too young, too uneducated, I can’t speak, I have children, I have parents, I have no time...

Do any of those sound familiar?

I am one who resisted responding to God’s call to ministry for years... from the time I was 10 I felt and heard God’s call on my life, but, I, like Moses, said, “Who am I? Not me?”

Go find someone else to do your work.

But God is insistent... God never stops calling...

But the really marvellous thing about God is that God doesn’t care if we don’t feel as if we have the skills to do what God is calling us to do.

God can do wonders through us.

God's power and spirit blow through us and we become much more than we thought we could be.

And suddenly we are saying, "Here I am Lord, send me."

I think Jesus had some of the same hesitation that Moses and each of us have at times.

Even Jesus, who heard God bless him and call him beloved at his baptism, who had the most intimate relationship with God that is recorded, even Jesus felt the temptation to be safe at times.

While the gospel reading says, "From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."

I don't believe that this was ordained by God.

But rather, what I believe is that Jesus knew that in his challenge to the governing authorities, in the way he lived, he was setting himself on a course that would lead to a clash...and one that ultimately led to his death.

His death on a cross...

In this same passage Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

This verse, taken out of context, is often trivialized.

You may have heard or said, "Such and such is my cross to bear."

But I don't think that is what Jesus meant at all.

Picking up Jesus' cross is living his life.

Living a life of feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, freeing the oppressed and enslaved.

And yes, it will lead us into clashes with those in authority... with those who have a vested interest in the status quo.

And in some parts of the world, following Jesus, picking up Jesus' cross will lead to death.

But Jesus' cross isn't a symbol of death...

It isn't Jesus hanging on the cross.

It is the empty cross... a symbol of resurrection.

The promise that death is not the end.

And the promise of the God of Abraham and the God of Moses and the God of Jesus that we will not be abandoned.

What is God calling you to do?

What is God calling us to do?

It may be different from what we may have dreamed.

And there will be times when we may feel as if what God is asking or nudging us towards is too difficult for us.

We don't have enough money, time or people.

But the faithful response, as God explains to Moses, as Jesus lives his life... is to recognize that it is not what we can do, as what God can do through us.

What a relief! And how wonderfully true!

Let us listen for God's word to us.

Let us pick up Jesus' cross.

Let God work through us.

Thanks be to God, amen.