



To let you know where we will be going in the coming weeks, I will begin a four-message series next Sunday titled *Music of the Heart*. Each message will be based on a song that carries a spiritual truth. They are not what we would normally refer to as *sacred* music, and that is intentional. They are pop songs that are favorites of mine, and one of the reasons why I chose to use pop songs is because I believe that we sometimes create too much of a division between the sacred and the secular. I believe all of God's creation is sacred, regardless of whether or not we see a particular part of that creation as sacred or not. Music, in particular, is sacred because of the way it can move us and touch our hearts. Few things in life carry the power of music, and I believe that is part of God's intent for music. The songs I will use are – *He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother*, by The Hollies. The spiritual theme is that we are our brother's (and sister's) keeper. *You're My Best Friend*, by Queen, and the theme of friendship, from the story of David and Jonathan. *One*, by U2, and the theme of unity, as spoken to by Jesus at the Last Supper. *The Long and Winding Road*, by the Beatles, and the theme of the wandering path that our lives sometimes takes, but the way in which God leads us along that path.

Upon the conclusion of that series we will move into a series of messages titled *The Great Commands*, in which we will study some of the great commands of Scripture, such as Micah 6:8 – *He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God*. From there, it will be a series about ministering to others in various situations.

Today we ordain Diane Bland and Julie Mulcahy as elders, so I will use the occasion to speak about the importance of leadership, with a message titled *The Gift of Leadership*.

Our text for the morning is John 13:1-9, a familiar passage where Jesus washes the feet of the disciples –

1 It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

2 The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus.

3 Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God;

4 so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist.

5 After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"
7 Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."
8 "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet."
Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."
9 "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"

There are so many things we can say about leadership and the qualities of a leader –

A leader should model humility. Leadership can produce inflated egos – or feed egos already inflated – and that is when problems can become apparent, especially in churches. There have been too many tragic examples of church leaders who have struggled, and at the root of their problems is often a lack of humility.

A leader should lead by example.

A leader must be committed. Leadership is not for the faint of heart, and it is not for those who are unwilling to make a commitment to what leadership asks.

A leader cannot be easily encouraged. There have been numerous times over the years when I wanted to quit. On some occasions I prayed and asked God to give me something else to do, but when things are difficult, that is the time to become recommitted.

A leader must be willing to make sacrifices. Time is certainly one of the areas of sacrifice, as being in a position of leadership requires a lot of time.

A leader must have thick skin. Criticism often comes with being a leader, and none of us enjoy criticism, but we must learn how to deal with it and not become discouraged by it.

A leader must have a strong prayer life. There are times when being a leader is very lonely, and a leader must have a place to turn in order to find support and strength, and prayer will certainly provide this.

There are many more qualities that can be mentioned, but I will focus on four this morning –

1. *Leadership Is A Gift.*

Leadership is important in every area of life, be it business, political, or spiritual. Leadership, however, is a somewhat elusive and rare gift. While there are many positions of leadership, not every position is filled by someone who possesses the gift of leadership. And make no mistake about it – leadership is a gift.

When I say that leadership is a gift, I mean that in the expected sense, as a spiritual gift possessed by the person who is gifted to be a leader. But there is another way in which leadership is a gift, and that is what I want us to think about this morning. Leadership just a gift in the sense of being a talent or an ability, as we might say that someone has a talent for music, or art, or athletics; leadership is also a gift to the people the leader serves.

One of the ways in which leadership is a gift to people is through the providing of a vision and focus. When I was on vacation last week we were visiting a beach one day. I was sitting on the beach, reading a book, and became aware of music coming from all directions. Many people on the beach had radios and music devices with them and there was a lot of music. I would find my ear drifting toward a song, then another song, and another song, making it hard not only to concentrate on my book, but even to listen to just one of the songs. I thought about how that was analogous to what a leader often faces. There are so many things that come our way in terms of opportunities – good and worthy opportunities – but there it is not possible to take up every opportunity. At times, the many opportunities can be like trying to take a drink out of a fire hydrant. Imagine turning on a fire hydrant and then trying to take a drink out of the rushing water – it would be very difficult! Sometimes, the best thing a leader can do is to say *that is a very good opportunity, but we simply cannot take it on at this time. We are involved in so many good and worthy endeavors already that we cannot stretch our resources that thin.* This is an

important part of providing vision. We are all familiar with Proverbs 29:18, which tells us that *where there is no vision, the people perish*. Vision provides focus, and focus allows individuals and congregations, to better use their gifts and abilities.

2. *Leadership Seeks the Person; the Person Does Not Seek Leadership.*

In terms of spiritual leadership, I believe a true leader never seeks a position of leadership, but the position seeks the person. Leadership finds the person.

I was given some very good advice years ago, when a trusted member of a church told me how to find the true leaders in a congregation. *Don't look at the list of leaders they told me; instead, find out who it is that people listen to when they speak. The people who have the ear of the congregation are the true leaders, regardless of what might be listed on a piece of paper.* I have found that advice to be very accurate. In the churches I have served, I have watched and observed in order to discover those leaders.

People search out leadership opportunities in business. People search out leadership opportunities in politics. In spiritual endeavors, however, we do not seek out leadership, but allow leadership to seek us. It is not appropriate, in my opinion, for a person to seek a position of spiritual leadership because that is not the way that spiritual leadership operates. We *recognize* spiritual leadership and then *follow* that leadership; we do not award spiritual leadership to a person simply because they are seeking it.

People are often surprised when asked to serve in positions of leadership, which is exactly how it should be. Peter was not looking to be an apostle. He was just some guy trying to make a living as a fisherman. The same was true of James, John, and Andrew. Matthew was counting his money in his tax office or whatever else he did in his office. And Paul! What was Paul doing? He was out to persecute followers of Jesus! Not only was he not looking to be an apostle, he was out to rid the world of followers of Jesus!

3. *Leadership Relies Upon Power, But It Is the Power of Servanthood.*

Power is, obviously, a major part of much of the leadership in our world.

Our Scripture text is one of the best examples of what we call *servant leadership*. Servant leadership is not the same as the kind of leadership we find in politics and business. Servant leadership is found in positions of spiritual leadership, and as it is based in spirituality it functions according to different principles than other forms of leadership. Servant leadership, for example, does not view power in the same way as political leadership. Political leadership operates on power – the kind of power that operates by a majority of votes and, when necessary, coercion. Spiritual leadership also operates on power, but a different type of power – never coercive, but the power of example. When Jesus knelt and washed the feet of the disciples he was demonstrating, by example, how they were to live and how they were to treat one another. It was the power of Jesus' example – as a servant – that taught the disciples about how they were to lead others. If, for instance, a leader wants people to be compassionate, the leader must be compassionate. If the leader wants people to be kind, the leader must be kind. If the leader wants people to be generous, the leader must be generous. A good example for us this morning is Laine's leadership with Vacation Bible School. Look around the sanctuary at all the decorations, and throughout the building. Laine does not ask people to come and do the work while she stays at home; she is hearing providing the example of leadership, investing many hours of work.

This is the type of leadership that is in short supply these days, unfortunately.

Jesus often gave examples of servant leadership when he made statements such as, Matthew 20:16, *the last will be first, and the first will be last* and Mark 8:35, *whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it*. He certainly demonstrated servant leadership when he washed the feet of the disciples. When Peter protested that Jesus should not be washing feet, it was probably because Peter was struggling to accept the role of being a servant in his own life. It is not easy to be a servant. It is, oftentimes, easier to adopt the types of leadership that exalt

us to positions of privilege and security, but servant leadership is what we are called to, as modeled by Jesus.

4. *Leadership Is Hard.*

Leadership has always been hard, but in the hyper-partisan, divided times in which we live, it's become even harder.

When I was an associate minister, back in the 80s, there were many times when I observed the decisions and difficulties placed upon our minister. On many occasions I thought to myself, *I am so glad I do not have to deal with that.* Upon leaving that position, and entering senior minister positions, I learned what it was like to be in a position where I am faced with difficult decisions and difficult circumstances that I cannot avoid. Personally, I have often found leadership to be a heavy mantle to carry. Going into ministry, I did not think of myself as a leader, although ministers are required to function as a leader, whether or not they envision themselves in that role. I think of myself more as a pastor than as a leader. Understanding that a pastor is also a leader, I believe my natural gifts and tendencies gravitate toward encouragement, caring, and comforting, so stepping into the role of leadership is not what comes natural to me.

Don't be surprised that leadership is difficult. Don't be discouraged. Don't take it personally. Don't blame yourself when things are difficult. It's not your fault that leadership is difficult; it's just reality. Do you think Peter found it easy? Do you think Paul found it easy? Do you think Moses found it easy? They did not. Exodus 17:8-13 contains a story about one of the difficulties Moses faced as a leader –

8 *The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim.*

9 *Moses said to Joshua, "Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands."*

10 *So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill.*

11 *As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning.*

12 *When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset.*

I like the image of Aaron and Hur holding up the hands of Moses when he became tired. As leaders, we depend upon the support, care, and prayers of others. Take the time to encourage leaders and assure them of your prayers.

Last month, on the 23rd, I came to the 38th anniversary of my ordination. I remember that service very well, and in particular I remember the laying on of hands portion of the service. I remember the weight of those hands upon me, and when I looked at my ordination certificate the other day, I realized that of the twelve people who signed it, only two are still alive. The others have joined what Hebrews 12:1 describes as that *great cloud of witnesses* that surrounds us. Even though most of the individuals who took part in my ordination are now gone, they continue to mold and shape my life in important ways. And when I think of the weight of their hands upon me, all those years ago, I think about the ways in which they continue to lift me up and to encourage me, and that in a spiritual sense, their hands are still upon me.

Leaders are never alone. Never. However difficult it gets, leaders are never alone. I am grateful to God for that knowledge, and I am grateful for *The Gift of Leadership*.

