

**Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> October 2021**  
**Trinity 20 (B)**

**Liverpool Parish Church**

**OT: Isaiah 53.4-end**  
**NT: Hebrews 5.1-10**  
**G: Mark 10.35-45**

**For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.'**

I find that the most difficult part of preaching is trying to interpret the lectionary readings in such a way that allows me to find the introduction that links the readings together and that can act as the route into the readings for the congregation this is achieved by my reading and then re-reading of the set readings to see if there is a direction where I am led. Preparations this week have led me to think about leadership, to think about different styles of leadership, my own included.

Leadership and its varying styles of manifestation is an area that has fascinated me for some time.

A search in the 21<sup>st</sup> century preachers go to reference source, Google provided one billion eight hundred and twenty-two million results in a search that took only 0.57 seconds suffice to say that a lot has been written and published about leadership.

"The One Minute Manager," "Good to Great," "How to Win Friends and Influence People," "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People." These are just some of the titles that even a cursory glance at the non-fiction section in any respectable bookshop reveals, a range of titles on the theme of leadership. Safe to say that it continues to be a growth industry.

I still have a copy of "The One Minute Manager" somewhere in my study next to my original Filofax purchased just after I completed a time management course in the mid-eighties understanding what makes a leader is as I have said a fascinating study.

But has there ever been a time in the history of humankind when there was more interest in how to lead and to manage and more scrutiny on leaders?

We have come a long way from the view that everything could be covered in two ways – the first being the 'carrot' and the second being the 'stick.' Reward or punishment are poles apart, but are, sadly, still the approach many use in the management of personnel.

In gifting Jesus to the world, God deliberately chooses a different path. Of course, Christ speaks and ministers with authority. But it's not the kind that rides rough-shod over people. Instead, He identifies with folk, comes alongside and gently guides.

With a truly 'open door' policy, which welcomes questions and engages in serious discussion, Jesus doesn't even lose His temper when dealing with "Boanerges...the sons of thunder," James and John (Mark's Gospel 10:35-45). Instead, Christ answers their question with a question, spelling out to them the implications and ultimate cost of the 'promotion' they seek for themselves: "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with?" (v38).

Jesus also goes on to make quite plain the need to understand their proper place in the 'company' structures: "...to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared." (v40)

This is clearly a nod in the direction of the importance of submitting to the Lordship of God Almighty, à la Psalm 104 and Job 38.

So far, so very normal...at least in terms of modern management techniques! Much of this you might find in any of the tomes penned on the subject in our day and age. "You get back what you put in" or "no gain without pain" might sum up this approach to leadership. Plus, "you need to know your place" or "there's a pecking order." Every company has a clear set of steps on the ladder to the top.

But, the second half of the portion from Mark 10 is where we find Jesus diverging hugely from what might appear acceptable in today's "dog eat dog" approach to advancing one's career: Sometimes we paint members of the early church as perfect examples of how to follow Jesus – we almost make 'plaster saints' of them. In contrast, the question raised by James and John in this brief interchange with Jesus reveals how very 'ordinary' they actually were. Their request, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory," (v35) appears to be a display of raw ambition. As ugly as this may seem at first glance, it gives Jesus the chance to ask a question of His own: "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with?" (v38b.)

Using that as a platform, Christ then goes on to underline the importance of service as a core value of the Kingdom of God: "whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all." (Verses 43b-44.)

To rise up one must first bow down.

To lead, one must serve.

And, just to show that this applies across the board in the way God's Kingdom operates, Christ asserts: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10: 45.) Jesus referring directly to the prophecy of Isaiah

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“yet he bore the sin of many,  
and made intercession for the transgressor”.

Now then, taking together this call of Christ to servanthood from Mark 10, and the references to the prophet Isaiah Mark is clearly pointing to Christ, the Messiah, the suffering servant.

There is a sense in which we are to recognise our place in the purposes of God and resist a drive towards self-importance. Instead, we are to

follow the example of our High Priest, Jesus Christ, in the way that we love and serve others every day, even when it costs us something, perhaps especially when personal sacrifice is involved.

Coming back to the subject of leadership, Paul's letter to the Hebrews chapter 5 makes reference to Psalm 110 and the somewhat obscure figure of Melchizedek.

Delving into Genesis chapter 14, verses 17-20 reveals a description of Melchizedek as a king and a priest. There is a clear parallel here with Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah, the anointed One of God. Although King and Head of the Church, Jesus is also our intermediary; the One who stands in the gap between mankind and God, pleading our case and offering Himself that we might be pardoned from our sin.

Like every other priest in Scripture, the calling is to represent people before God.

A calling that at ordination we are reminded with these words “Priests are called to be servants and shepherds among the people to whom they are sent” To achieve that requires empathy. In life and death, nobody fills that role better than Christ. Yet, in one respect, we know that He is different from every other priest; unlike us, He is perfect, without sin.

But this idea of a Royal priesthood is not something that is exclusive to all of us who have been ordained it is for all who profess the faith of Christ as described in the 1<sup>st</sup> Chapter of Peter verse 9

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people

Our call then as the chosen people of God is to serve as Christ served

"whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all."

Fr. Bill Addy