
Grace & Peace

Indian River Presbyterian Church

November 19, 2006

Some thoughts from your pastor...

Teddy Roosevelt is a name you know. The twenty-sixth president of the United States. Rough Rider. Spanish-American War. “Speak softly and carry a big stick.” Man of action. Man with a plan. “He wanted to put an end to all the evil in the world between sunrise and sunset.” You know something about him. But you may not know the names Ferdinand de Lesseps, Phillipe Bunau-Varilla, George Shattuck Morrison, John Tyler, William Nelson Cromwell, John Stevens, William Gorgas, George W. Goethals. I’ve just finished a book on the building of the Panama Canal ([The Path Between the Seas](#)-David McCullough) and all of these characters, along with Teddy Roosevelt and a host of others, played major roles in a project that took nearly fifty years to complete. The actual dates of construction were 1881-1914, but the dreaming, surveying, planning, funding and recruitment preceded the actual work by another decade and more. In fact, the first thoughts of a canal across the isthmus can be dated to the middle of the sixteenth century. But, I digress...

What I really want to write about is leadership. And I do it against the backdrop of this book...and leadership seen in another book. The contrast between the two is stunning. There are many characters in the story of the building of the canal, most of them unknown, who are simply remarkable in their sacrifice and dedication. But the main players are driven by what can only be called hubris-pride, masquerading as national interest, the service of humanity, the greater good of society, economic benefit, technological advance, etc., etc. The cost, in human lives, integrity, money and relationships, seems not to have mattered. What mattered most were individual reputation, legacy and financial gain.

What makes the judgment of character so difficult is that great good can come from lousy motives. Lousy in the etymological sense of the word—a ‘louse’ is a ‘lice’; to be ‘lousy’ is to be infested with them. Motives are hidden, unseen, tricky. Rationalizations and external benefit clothe these inner workings, these lice of the soul. Men and women can be enormously self-serving and actually appear to be seeking the advance of the aforementioned altruistic ends. But when the layers are peeled away, and the ‘thoughts and intentions of the hearts’ are exposed, the ‘louse’ is there.

Christians beware. Character...deep, gospel-shaped, God-infused, sin-conscious, louse-destroying, Christ-dependent character, is the only safeguard against the kinds of folly exhibited in too many leaders. We are not immune to the dangers of ‘lousy’, that is, diseased, motives. The desires to ‘have an impact’, ‘gain influence for the sake of the gospel’, ‘make a difference’, ‘change the world’ and other such phrases sound harmless enough...even virtuous. But they can lead us to dangerous places. The desire as leaders to be measured on the basis of such things can make a mess of life. Friendships, marriages, organizations...churches...can all fall prey to what becomes a subtle form of worldliness. Creativity, resources, vision, formulas, plans, if not carefully regulated by soul-deep character, become tools wielded to ends that may appear good, but which, measured by the costs required, prove evil. And with that comes the forfeiture of a true and final confidence in the power of God to effect change through frail, dependent creatures.

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The 'other' book is instructive at this point. It is Second Samuel. And the character in the story is David...a King. A king with big fish to fry...a king with an enormous vision...a king with unparalleled gifts (poet, musician, courageous, valiant commander, recruiter of men, wise diplomat and even an escape artist) ...a king with a platform, that is, a reputation: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands" (1 Samuel 18:7)...a king in position to leverage all of his assets for some great cause...a king positioned to 'make a difference for the kingdom'. But listen very carefully to the narrator of the story. Listen very carefully. The writer, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, discloses for our benefit characteristics critical for understanding true, God-pleasing leadership. It is leadership we could hope for in all leaders, be they political, educational, civic, business or religious. But I want you to think of church leaders...your church leaders.

The setting is David's first military action against the Canaanites. There are five things here.

- 1) 2 Samuel 5:10: 'And he became more and more powerful, **because the LORD God Almighty was with him.**' Listen to leaders. What do you hear? Do you hear a joyful, glad-hearted acknowledgement of the presence of the LORD God Almighty as the **only** explanation for **any** success? True leadership is grateful, humble leadership...profoundly so, and for two reasons. Any leader with his wits about him has a fundamental understanding that he is what he is because of creation and redemption. Do we hear recognition of this from our leaders? Every gift, every benefit, every learning experience, every 'coincidence' of life, every shaping influence, every 'successful deal' has one Author...the LORD God Almighty, the Creator of the ends of the earth...and everything in between. Every true leader knows this and is at pains to make it clear to any who would think otherwise. And every true leader will acknowledge, as well, that he is the object of infinite mercy and love; will acknowledge freely that his heart is capable of more heinous and gross sin than the mortal mind can comprehend; will acknowledge that he has been wrong, more often than right, and that God, in mercy and kindness has, again and again, spared him the consequences of his own foolishness. Do we hear leaders saying this? I am not asking if we think they **believe** these things. I am asking if we hear them **saying** these things. After all, we do talk the most freely and often about the things that are the most real to us.
- 2) 2 Samuel 5:12: 'And David knew that the LORD had established him as king over Israel and had exalted his kingdom **for the sake of his people.**' Here is something that pierces the outer crust of most thinking about leadership: Do leaders acknowledge that they are who they are, that they are where they are for one signal purpose, the well-being of the people of God? How do leaders view the church, the people of God? It is the only 'institution' that will never end; the only organization worth serving. It is the bride of Christ. It is the Lord's treasured possession. Do leaders love the church? Do they serve the church? And do they understand, as David seems to have understood, that all that they are and all that they have is given to them 'for the sake of His people'? When I ask this, I encourage you to keep in mind that the 'people' in view is not some ethereal, non-descript, nameless, faceless idea. This is important, because it is very easy to think that you are committed to people when you are committed only to an idea...the 'Church'. For David, these were real people in a real place at a real time, exposed to real dangers. Do leaders love the particular people of their particular churches? Are their gifts, their time, their talents employed, ultimately, for the sake of these particular people in this particular place?

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- 3) 2 Samuel 5:19, 23: ‘so David *inquired of the LORD*’ ...again ‘David *inquired of the LORD*’. Just this past week I had a lengthy conversation with a pastor friend who recently left the church he had served for nearly 20 years. There was sadness about his departure because he had not wanted to leave. But leaving became the only option because he did not have the support of his leaders. I asked what had changed; how, after a very faithful and fruitful ministry touching hundreds and hundreds of lives, could he lose their support? There were a few things mentioned. But the first he mentioned because, to his mind, it **was** the first and the most important: “We weren’t praying as much. It happened slowly. Some men were added to our Session who weren’t there at the beginning. I hadn’t really trained them. Then we all, my staff, my elders and I, got very busy...and we stopped praying. We opened and closed in prayer...like parentheses framing what we were doing...but we stopped praying like we had.” Twice in this narrative David prays. The way this passage is written suggests that this was a habit for him. And notice the word that is used...he inquired. He didn’t come to the Lord with a plan, a scheme, an approach....He inquired. He asked. He sought. He didn’t know what to do and he needed to know, so he inquired. Listen not only to what your leaders say, but listen to their prayers. Again, they all will pray. But how do they pray? What do you hear when they pray? Do they seek the Lord? Do they inquire of the Lord? Are their prayers admissions of their own need of direction, their own helplessness before the face of enemies so great that those enemies could say of them, and of us all, ‘even the blind and the lame can ward you off’ (2 Samuel 5:6)?
- 4) 2 Samuel 5:21: ‘The Philistines abandoned their idols there and *David and his men carried them off*.’ The parallel passage in 1 Chronicles 14:12 says ‘*David gave orders to burn them in fire*’. Christians and violence don’t go together. To try to imagine your leaders destroying idols is a difficult image to conjure. But think of it this way: idols rob God of his glory and people of their joy in God. An idol is an enemy. You may love it...we always love what we worship...but it is an enemy. Idols are terrorists and you do not negotiate with terrorists...they do not play by the rules...they have none. You destroy terrorists...or they will destroy you. Do your leaders take sin, the essence of idolatry, seriously? Are they prepared to destroy it? Are they prepared to act with holy violence in destroying **your** idols? In the near term, you will not understand them and you may hate them, just as you would ‘hate’ a surgeon for cutting into your diseased flesh. In the long term, however, you will love them for it. And this, as much as anything, is the measure of their faithfulness.
- 5) 2 Samuel 5:25: ‘So David *did as the LORD commanded him*.’ Obedience is the leaven that influences everything. Obedience requires knowing what is to be obeyed. Obedience, then, presupposes inquiring and it presupposes learning. And it presupposes the ‘deep, gospel-shaped, God-infused, sin-conscious, Christ-dependent character’ of which we spoke earlier. It takes character to obey. Any leader who reads this phrase, ‘so David did as the Lord commanded him’ and fails to tremble has little idea what it means to be a leader in the midst of the people of God. Any leader who ‘aspires’ to this is either crazy or a fool. To presume to speak for God, lead in the place of God, decide with the mind of God is so ominous as to make the most able cringe. Do we see this? Do we hear this from our leaders? Do we hear them crying out for help from the Lord? Do we hear them seeking the prayerful support of their people? As some of you know, Charles Spurgeon, when asked about the success of his ministry, said, simply, ‘My people pray for me’. And so now it is back on us...the followers.

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Followers become leaders in the church because *the* leaders in the church are so utterly capable of disobedience, so utterly capable of failure. Without the faithful, prayerful support of their people, the entire enterprise is doomed.

In all of this, I have said little of Christ. But He is here. You catch a glimpse of what Christ, the greater King, will look like. He is the King Who knew the presence of the LORD God Almighty; His entire ministry was, and is, 'for the sake of His people'; He, even He...the King of the kings and the Lord of the Lords, God incarnate, eternal, ineffably sublime...even He...sought His Father and never, ever presumed to do anything other than His will; it is He who, for the glory of His Father and the well-being of His people will destroy all His enemies and yours, trampling all idols under His feet; and He, the greater David, ever faithful, ever obedient, 'did as the LORD commanded'...always.

And He is the same One whose tender mercies are over all His works...Who does not cry out in the street...the bruised reed He does not break...the smoking flax He will not snuff out. Oh, oh, for leaders like this. I asked you to be thinking of your church leaders as you read these thoughts. Do you see why I beg you to pray? Pray for me and for your elders. Pray for other leaders in this church. Pray for future leaders. Pray that we may have grace and courage to emulate our Leader and King, exhibiting these characteristics for His glory and your good.

And as you pray, let me encourage you to be thankful...for you do have the one Leader you need. Your earthly leaders are frail, but He is not. Your earthly leaders will stumble, but He will not. Your earthly leaders lack wisdom, but He does not. Your earthly leaders will long to be like Jesus, but they are not. Jesus is the true and perfect Leader and King. He will never fail you.

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Mike