

"JESUS SHOWS THE WAY"

A Sermon By

Philip A. C. Clarke

Park Avenue United Methodist Church  
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New York, New York 10028  
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### INTRODUCTION

Another football story with which to "kick-off" today's sermon....it was during the early years of the NFL and as the second quarter came to an end in the championship game between the Green Bay Packers and the New York Giants, Curly Lambeau, the Green Bay Coach, was thinking about what to say to his players in the locker room at halftime. He figured this would be one of the most important "chalk talks" of his coaching career. With the Packers on the short end of the half-time score, 16-14, the players were counting on him for an inspirational revised game plan.

But, unfortunately, Lambeau never got to give that all-important halftime inspirational talk. He got lost in thought on his way to the locker room and opened the door to what he thought was the Clubhouse and wound up out on the street. Before he realized his error, the door slammed shut behind him. The coach was locked out.

He pounded on the door, but it did no good. Then he raced to the nearest gate where the security guard refused to let him in. "If you're the coach, what are you doing out here on the sidewalk?" sneered the guard. He hustled off to another gate and another guard, but no amount of pleading or threats could get him back in. "Yea...sure," said one guard..."And I'm the King of England!"

Meanwhile, back in the locker room the Packer players were wondering what had happened to their coach. Where had he gone? As the halftime minutes ticked down, the puzzled players waited....no agreement on a new game plan. By this time, their angry, red-faced coach had charged the main gate...only to be stopped once again. Screaming now at the top of his voice and attracting a crowd, some reporters recognized him and helped to convince the security guards that he was indeed the Green Bay Packer coach. Anyway, by the time he reached the locker room, the second half was to begin. End of story, except that without the coach's instructions the Packers faltered in the last two quarters and lost that championship game by the score of 23 - 17. Do any of you remember that game?

### IMPORTANCE OF LEADERSHIP

One of the most important themes in society today is leadership. Every corporation, every institution yearns for strong, effective leadership.

Perhaps you may remember when Chrysler Corporation a few years back was on the economic ropes...nearly bankrupt. Then they went out and hired Lee Iacocca to save this troubled company and within five years Chrysler experienced a profit of 925 million dollars! That's leadership. You may wonder at times how anyone can ever justify those large salaries paid to corporate CEOs. The answer is that leadership makes or breaks any organization. No organization is stronger than its leader.

Jesus, to me, was a strong leader....so strong that the organization He helped to found is still prospering 2,000 years after His death. How did He do it? What were His leadership principles and is there anything that we can learn from the way He headed up His organization that might be applied to churches and to other organizations today?

Let me suggest three things.

PAINTED A VISION

For one thing, Jesus painted a vision. No company, no institution succeeds today IF its leader does not have a vision.

Jesus painted a vision for His disciples, for His followers. That vision was the Kingdom of God. The disciples, I'm sure, had a difficult time grasping that vision. They would not truly appreciate that vision until He had left them, until after His death. But the very fact that we are in this room here this morning....two thousand years after His death and departure is sufficient evidence that the disciples finally "got it". The vision that Jesus was painting of that Kingdom was that it was to be a kingdom of service. Said He,

"Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all, for the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many."

That was the vision of Jesus.

There was a Broadway production a few years back entitled 1776. Remember it? The production centered around John Adams, as he attempts to get the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia to act decisively and declare independence from England. The times are calling for change. But certain members of this congress are painfully slow to move. The representatives lack imagination or are even self-serving and you wonder how in the world they will emerge with a united spirit.

Adams, seeing the issues clearly, struggles to gather support for what he believes in so strongly. Even though no colonies have ever broken away before from a mother country, these men must seize the hour and vote for independence. Unfortunately, John Dickenson from Pennsylvania gets a motion passed that in order to approve the Declaration of Independence written by Thomas Jefferson of Virginia, the vote must be unanimous. All thirteen colonies must say "yes". And it's quite obvious that there's just no way such agreement will ever be reached.

Emergency dispatches continue to arrive from General George Washington who was made chief of the continental forces a year earlier. He's up in New York where the British have just landed with 25,000 crack and trained troops. He writes that it's imperative that action must be taken - NOW! *Carpe Diem!*

One scene is quite memorable. It's the night of July 3rd, 1776 and the hall is empty save for John Adams, who reviews the facts as he sees them. South Carolina and Pennsylvania are opposed to this motion for independence. Delaware is undecided. New York's representatives are awaiting further instructions. It looks hopeless. Wrestling with a vision shared by only a few, Adams paces back and forth in the hall. We can feel the stress in his body as we watch. Suddenly he looks up and cries out dramatically into the void: is anybody there? Does anybody care? Does anybody see what I see?

Jesus could see what the disciples could not see: the Kingdom - the Kingdom of God....where service to others is included and so He sought to paint a picture for them. That is the first requisite for leadership - HAVE A VISION!

HE LED WITH LOVE, NOT FEAR

In the second place, Jesus led His disciples with love and not with fear. He was a master at motivating people. He understood that you can accomplish more through love than through fear. Patient with people, with His followers. His disciples were really quite ordinary men. Sometimes they were quarrelsome...lashing out at each other. Sometimes they lacked courage and at times they even acted quite infantile. In today's lesson that Sarah read we find two of the disciples "jockeying" for power. Listen to the conversation...

"Teacher....we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you"....they begin....sounding like first-graders hoping to get a favor from their teacher. "And what do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asks patiently. "Grant us, Jesus, to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left hand, in your glory".

Jesus shook His head. "You do not know what you are asking" He said to them. "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?"

I've often wondered, as I have read that passage, if any other leader would have handled the disciples that gently? I think their question showed that they had very little understanding of the Kingdom He was trying to introduce to them. His Kingdom is about "servant-hood" and not about power and ego-satisfaction. But Jesus, as we say, kept His cool and He led them through love - not fear.

There is something to be said for leading by fear. And some of our nation's most effective leaders have been pretty great intimidators. General Patton comes to mind and what about General Andrew Jackson, of whom it was said, that he,

"Got the most out of his men because they feared him more than they feared the enemy....."

David J. Mahoney, Chairman of Norton Simon, is of that leadership style. Richard Beeson, President of Norton Simon's Canada Dry Division, had been on the job only a few weeks when he talked to Mahoney about goals and here's how he recalls their conversation going...

"I said to Mahoney, 'Dave...we're a little bit below budget now and I think we can hold that for the rest of the year. It won't get any worse' Dave looked at me, smiled and said, 'Be on budget by the six-month mark; be on budget by the year end'. 'But Dave' I said, 'there isn't enough time to get on by the half. I inherited this situation after all' 'Still smiling, Dave looked at me and said, 'Do I pay you a lot of money? Do I bother you? Then don't tell me what the goals should be. Be on budget by the half. Be on budget by the end of the year.'

'And what if I can't, Dave?' I asked. 'Then clean out your desk and go home.....'"

Beeson argued why he couldn't meet the goals to which Mahoney replied,

"Not interested. My board and my stockholders want me to make my numbers. And the way I make my numbers is if you guys make your numbers. Make your answers, Beeson!"

Now...to some people that's leadership, but let me ask you how would you like to live in that environment day after day? Over the long haul would it truly motivate you or would it drain you of your enthusiasm and your loyalty? An increasing number of studies of leadership styles indicate that while leadership by fear may work fine in short-term situations, over the long run, genuinely caring about people works far better.

Someone has said,

"In my experience, there are two great motivators in life. One is fear. The other is love. You can manage an organization by fear, but if you do your will ensure that people don't perform up to their real capabilities."

There's truth in that observation. Jesus had no interest in intimidating His disciples. He dealt with them patiently and with great concern...genuine concern. He painted a vision. He led with love, not fear. But there's a third thing we need to note about His style of leadership and that is that He led through example.

#### JESUS LED THROUGH EXAMPLE

He asked them,

"Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?"

"We are able" James and John replied...but it was somewhat evident that they really had little idea what He was talking about.....

Jesus didn't talk about laying down one's life for others. He laid down His own life. He didn't just talk about the high cost of caring and of love. He showed them the high cost involved. He didn't just talk about victory over death; He showed us victory over death. He led by example and it's that kind of leadership, I feel, that always lifts the rest of us to higher ground.... people who have the opportunity to say NO, but who quietly say YES....people who spend their lives serving rather than being served. Example. Example. Example. Wasn't it the great Albert Schweitzer who was once asked the question, "And how do you teach children responsibility?" He said there were three ways. "Example. Example. Example". Jesus showed us the way. He set the example.

#### AND WHAT ABOUT FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE

And what about Florence Nightingale.

The History Channel not too long ago reminded us that she had that kind of choice to make....she could have lived a pampered, shallow lifestyle. Her mother was a socialite who delighted in fine clothing and extravagant entertaining and lavish possessions. But her father, on the other hand, was a banker who took quite seriously the moral and spiritual development of young Florence. Apparently she was more like her father.

The time was in the 1840's...about the time this church was founded. England was a miserable place for many people...poverty and hunger were the daily companions of many. Florence Nightingale's social circle lived in comparative luxury. A trip to Greece and then to Egypt put her in touch with a group of Deaconesses in the Protestant tradition...humble women devoting themselves to charitable works, in great contrast to the women Florence knew back in England. They had a profound influence upon her and upon her return to England, she found a position as a nurse in a hospital for poor women...much against her family's wishes.

The Church of England tries to restrict its care to only members of the Church...and Florence fought them on that...making it possible for women of all religions and classes to receive care. During the Crimean War, she worked as a supervisor of nurses, braving the dangers of war to care for thousands of soldiers...Her calming presence was enough to soothe the wounded men and many of them moderated their uncivilized behavior when she was around. Stricken with fever, which left her weak, she nevertheless continued to work. After the war, she worked as an educator, giving lectures on improving hygiene in rural areas.

She died at the age of 90, after devoting her life to the service of others. Coming from a social and privileged background, she transformed the face of nursing...helping to make it into a well-regulated and well-respected profession. Inspiring thousands of young women all over the world, she didn't just lead seminars on nursing, she nursed people under some of the most difficult conditions imaginable. "A pencil in the hand of God", like Mother Teresa.

CLOSING Jesus painted a vision of a Kingdom of love and service to others. He showed us what that Kingdom of life and love was like through patient and enduring love. And He practiced what He preached, too....laying down His life in our behalf.

The Green Bay Packers once lost a championship because their leader was locked out of the stadium. If we - the Church of Christ - fail, it will be because we locked out our Leader and failed to heed His call and to follow His example of loving service to all. There's still time to do what He asks of each of us....yes, the least important fact of life is the score at half-time. There's still time for us to go out and run a big score on service to others, all in His name. Let's do it....and follow Him as He shows us the Way!

PRAYER Make us sensitive, once again, dear God....to your PRESENCE and to Your POWER in these moments of worship. Hear our confessions of confusion....and by Your grace, help us to amend our lives that we may be better followers of Jesus....that order may be brought out of the chaos of our confused thinking and careless action. By your Holy Spirit, renew within us a heart of grace. Grant us such a vision of Your truth and goodness that we may follow....not out of fear, but always out of love. For the race is so short, even at its longest, and we would try to always run it well....always to Your glory. Amen.