

Creed, Need, Seed
John 13: 1 -5 & 12 – 17
Makemie Presbyterian Church
March 29, 2009

¹³Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ²The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper ³Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.

¹²After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? ¹³You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. ¹⁷If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

This ends the reading.

Almost everyday I am in discussion with Jaxon about the leaders throughout history. We talk about Alexander of Macedonia, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln; of the great generals who served our country in the revolutionary war, in the civil war, and during the world wars. The last few days we have been talking about Pearl Harbor, as Jax created full color map of the Harbor as it looked during the bombing on December 7, 1941 with all the U.S. ships & Japanese planes & fires & bombs & men in the water, to turn in for his book project due Friday.

We've talked about FDR and his role as a strong leader during difficult times; although my Great Uncle Addison on my mother's side used to swear Pearl Harbor never happened; it was just FDR's deceitful way to involve the U.S. in the war.

All this talk of leaders brings me to the conclusion that we all know, that Jesus of Nazareth was the greatest leader the world has ever known.

In a time when leadership is in the news; being discussed, explored, explained in virtually every facet of our society, I say to you all today without any fear of being contradicted that Jesus of Nazareth was the greatest leader the world has ever known.

He possessed strength infinitely superior to that of the greatest military commanders & yet he also possessed tenderness so winsome that even little children were drawn to him.

He had awesome powers of concentration. He had a mind as quick & decisive as Bernie Madoff's trial. Yet he also retained a remarkable sensitivity for dealing with people, especially difficult people.

His power & his authority were attested by even by his enemies; and yet he was actually more comfortable with the meek & lowly of heart. His purity was without blemish; and yet he could move with perfect ease among the most despised of sinners.

Jesus is the leader of all leaders. No one in all of human history; no national or international fame has ever gained the allegiance of so many. Not Mohammed, not Buddha, not Confucius. Not anyone else.

Now I know, I know, that some attack him, some critique him, some ridicule him, but no one can ignore him. That is why every cult & sect on earth, every government & political philosophy, every academic & literary discipline sooner or later in one way or another must come to deal with Jesus.

So it's my contention if you wish to study leadership styles, begin with Jesus. But I warn you, if you dare to study the leadership style of Jesus inevitably you'll find yourself irresistibly drawn to becoming a committed follower of him.

And that's the risk, we are about to take.

Most of you know that I love to play with words. And in trying to capture the leadership style of Jesus I have come up with four phrases. Okay here goes: Jesus is the greatest leader the world has ever known because he shapes the creed; because he meets our need; because he shows by deed; and because he sows the seed.

Number One: He shapes the creed; that is Jesus creates, determines what you & I believe. That's the mark of a really great leader to form the belief system of those who follow. And here is

another hallmark of all great leaders; truthfulness. I think it's worth noting that Jesus always spoke the truth.

We know that phrase that is applied to leaders in our day; "he misspoke, she misspoke;" or "they offered a version of the truth" as if truth has a version. But these phrases could never be applied to Jesus. Jesus always spoke the truth because Jesus is the truth. A little further on in the gospel of John from where Ted read our text for today is one of the statements of Jesus. He says, "I am the way the truth & the life" (14:6).

There is never a place where Jesus ever cut the corner on ethics or fudged on a commitment or shaved an edge off a standard or spin-doctored (is that a word?) a difficult idea or watered down an unpalatable issue. Jesus said what he believed and we can believe what he said. And truthfulness is so important. Have you ever heard of a stable corporation, or a stable government, or a stable family that is untruthful? There is no such thing; I don't think, as a stable group of liars.

As followers of Jesus we are called always to seek the truth & speak the truth & obey the truth & love the truth. Jesus always speaks the truth so help him God.

Number two: he meets the need. Jesus said to his followers, also from the gospel of John, "I do not call you servants, I call you friends" (15:15). Have any of you ever heard of any other great leader who said this to their followers?

"I do not call you servants, I call you friends?"

When we study the life of Jesus in the gospels it becomes clear that he spent more time with his disciples than he did with the

crowds. There is no record in the New Testament of Jesus calling conferences or conventions or even Presbytery meetings. But there is an abundant record of Jesus spending long hours with his disciples; walking along the shores of the Sea of Galilee, or the Judean hills, or spending time under the shade of olive trees or around camp fires at the end of the day. Sharing things only friends may share. That's an important element of leadership. Why? Because every single one of us has a basic need in life & that is the need to have friendships & relationships that give meaning to our daily living. We need other people. That need is profound in all of us. And what I suggest is that Jesus, better than anyone else ever has or ever will, meets that need.

There is a paragraph here that I might put in later.

Number three; he leads by deed. All of my life I've heard the extraordinary passage Ted just read a few moments ago; where Jesus washed his disciples' feet. And every time I hear it I find myself overwhelmed with awe. Here the; Only Begotten of God, the Alpha & the Omega, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, wraps a towel around his waist, gets down on his knees, & washes his disciples dusty feet. It is one of the most incredible moments – ever. Jesus down on his knees, tenderly in an act of loving service demonstrates to his followers that they are to lead by serving. Our text this morning emphasizes Jesus' love for his disciples in this act. "Jesus, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." Or another translation gives "to the end" as "the full extent." Jesus loved them the full extent, he holds nothing back, and this love for his own

will find its full expression in the gift of his life. By washing his disciples' feet, Jesus enters into an intimate relationship with the disciples that mirrors his intimate relationship with God. The essence of the foot washing is that Jesus offers himself in love; the transformative power of the foot washing is in the gracious service of Jesus. God's love for the world in sending Jesus is here enacted in Jesus' love for his own.

Jesus asks nothing of the disciples other than they place themselves completely in his hands that they discard their images of who he is & how one comes to God & give themselves to his ministrations. He asks that they enter into relationship with him on his terms & that they allow their relationship with him to be defined by God's love & God's love alone. They are to allow Jesus to lead them in love, much like the image of the good shepherd in John 10. The foot washing removes the possibility of distance between Jesus & his followers & brings them face to face with the love of God for them. Peter's initial responses & the mention of Judas' betrayal make clear that accepting this gesture of love & hospitality is indeed a challenge for those who follow Jesus. The call to service in this text can't be separated from the call to participation with Jesus which leads us to Number four: he sows the seed.

It's an amazing to see when you look at the life of Jesus how he entrusted his work to the disciples. He didn't insist on doing all the work himself. Jesus understood that sometimes things have to happen to us before they can happen through us. Jesus understood there are some things in life we can only learn by experience. That's why Jesus sent the disciples out on those testing missions.

Remember those? Jesus called his disciples together, planted the seeds of his power & wisdom in them; so they might share the responsibility of his work & the glory of his work. We see these stories in Matthew 10 & Luke 10. Jesus calls the disciples together; says to them that they have great power & then he teaches them how to use it. He tells them they will encounter wonderful opportunities & he teaches them how to seize these opportunities. He warns them that they will also face fierce opposition & he teaches them how to respond to it.

Jesus says that they'll have all kinds of practical things to take & all kinds of practical things they'll need to do & then Jesus helps them pack their bags & sends them out.

He plants the seed but he is willing to let them bring the harvest. And later on, Luke tells us, when the disciples come back & they were excited & saying, "Lord, you should have seen this." And "Lord you should of seen that" Jesus smiles big as Alice's cat, (that's my translation) & says, "I was there. I saw it all. I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lighting" (10:18). "The kingdom of God has come near. "

Jesus gave his disciples trust, tools, & a taste of triumph. He trusted them to do his work, he gave them everything they needed to do the job, tools; and he let them taste the joy of triumph. And he's given us all the tools we need to do this as well.

Remember that old hymn "He Leadeth Me?" The refrain goes, 'He leadeth me! By his own hand He leadeth me! His faithful follower I would be, For by His hand He leadeth me.

In my own life I've decided that I will follow Jesus where ever he leads me. Will you say the same thing? I think the answer is yes.

Amen.