

## *Life Giving Leadership – The Jesus Movement*

*Deuteronomy 30: 15-20; 1 Corinthians 3: 1-9*

Which will you choose: life and prosperity, death and adversity? It's been well documented that many people in the younger generations of our time started to leave the church. They did this because they did not trust the institution. They were suspicious of corruption. They often proclaimed that the church does not live the social gospel. They talk about it, but they don't practice what they preach. Christianity didn't begin as an institution. Christianity started as a ,

I wanted to start off by thinking about how does one begins a social justice movement? There is a great example on YouTube that I want to share with you about some music festival participants on a hill. To start a social movement the first thing you need to do is you need to have a leader who has the guts to just stand out and be ridiculed. So, in this YouTube video one person goes off into this open field on the side of the hill and starts dancing erratically. Everyone at first starts looking and laughing to themselves and shaking their head thinking this person's crazy. What are they doing? Until another person is, for whatever reason, inspired to go join them and starts doing same thing. The reason it works is because the leader took the risk and made sure that it was easy to follow. The second person is really the key to starting a movement. They demonstrate to others that this really is easy to do. This person shows to everyone else that there isn't much to risk or fear just go for it and soon enough a couple more people join and then there's a couple more people join. There becomes a mass and as a group that's there other people are like I don't want to be left out and so they're running down in there dancing too to the point where suddenly the people sitting down are the ones that are looking awkward and ridiculous. And so now they feel they must be part of this movement this is the key to a successful movement; one that inspires others to join in a public space, asking us to do something different.

“Jean Vanier the founder of L’Arche Communities suggests that we all carry a deep wound of loneliness that is not easily overcome and that this wound is so much a part of our human conditions that we cannot escape it, try as we might. We want to belong in the worst way and so we join communities.”<sup>1</sup> When Jesus started this movement, the movement that Jesus started addressed this deep longing. Jesus reached out to people who had been cast aside, people who were oppressed, people who weren't in the good crowd. Jesus didn't go to the leaders of the temples, the Pharisees or to the government to start his revolution. He did something different.

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<sup>1</sup> Roger J. Gench, *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, Volume 1. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), p. 350.

We're told today that what God offers is life and prosperity, if we choose to follow Jesus. Paul in talking with the Corinthians wanted them to realize who they belong to. He points out that we need to be mature in our understanding and in our faith; to move from our childlike desire of simply wanting to belong, to move towards instead living in accordance with God's commandments and Jesus' teaching. Paul says that: "I could speak to you as spiritual people, but I speak to you rather as people have the flesh, as infants in Christ. I've fed you with milk not solid food for you were not ready for solid food." 1 Corinthians 3: 1-2. Paul claims that the Corinthians were not ready because there was still jealousy and quarreling among them. He talks about how one who plants and how one who waters have a common purpose, but they are a part of God's field. now this seemingly judgmental statement by Paul about the Corinthians can be uncomfortable for us as well and in exploring this statement what struck me is this that the milk is the message of love that we receive from God, the solid food though is the message of loving our enemies. obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today by loving the Lord your God, walking in God's ways and observing God's commandments, decrees, and ordinances then you shall live and become numerous and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you entered to possess'. Deut 30:16. The idea of obedience is not something we readily accept in our culture where independence is so valued. The word obey has been used to harm people, to harm women and other groups that aren't like us by the institutional church in its 2000 year history, but in this context what we need to know is that obedience isn't merely doing what one is told. Obedience is listening. More than just hearing and following. "Obedience is a discernment process that involves not only the mind but also and most especially one's heart."<sup>2</sup> When we think about listening to the spirit and what God is calling us as a church to do, when we think about the solid food that we are asked to eat; which is to love not only ourselves and others but also our enemies, what is the movement we are apart of doing in this world? What is our common purpose? How are we being transformed and what are we helping to transform in this world? Or to use the image from Paul; if we are God's field what are we planting? What is it that all of us together are building? What will we choose? Do we want to just stick with the milk or are we ready for solid food? I believe we are ready for solid food for we partake of it a lot.

The communion service is about moving beyond the simple sense of love. To come to this table means that we need to stop quarreling and to reconcile with one another and when we do that we are ready to partake of the solid food that inspires us to move beyond what we personally need; to reach out to others who have been cast aside. Like Jesus we are called to lead in a way that chooses life and it's easy to get led astray or to be misled. Servant leadership requires a community that uses its collective wisdom in a way that promotes growth of another. If we choose to follow Jesus, then we need to open our eyes and look around and see the things we don't want to see. We need to look into our community and notice who is isolated, who is alone, who is longing to belong. If we choose to follow Jesus we need to listen and discern what the spirit is truly asking us to engage in. If we choose to follow Jesus and become part of this

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<sup>2</sup> Carol J. Dempsey, *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, Volume 1 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), p. 340

movement we need to know that we are loved by Christ as we are in this moment and we need to remember that God's commandments and ways are not meant as restrictions, but rather as prescriptions that lead to the fulness of life for all people. In that sense their end is not meant to constrict but to set us free; to obey God sets us free.

So what is our common purpose? We are called to worship with all our hearts as we are here today. We are called to pray genuinely, to love our church and love our community in the same way, to believe that God loves us to remember the stories of Jesus and the radical crazy acts that he did, that we too must do to see Christ in all people around us, to share God's love with someone who has forgotten it, take delight in God's good gifts and see that all life is holy. We need to open our hearts to the spirit and search for something deeper and better than our own comfort. Let's be uncomfortable together in the love of God. Let us live in the joy beneath it all and let God make our life prosperous, wonderful and abundant. All it takes is for us to join in the movement, to trust in the leadership that Jesus provided and know that we too can lead others and inspire others to give of what we have, to make somebody else's day better, to stand up against things that are making this world harmful to others, stand up for the oppressed, take the risk of sharing what you know to be true with this world, for God loves you, believes in you and calls you to lead and to be part of this movement.

And for this we give God thanks. Amen.