

Title: So, you want to be a leader?
Text: Acts 20.28-38
Theme: Leaders who look like Jesus
Series: Acts
Prop Stmtnt: A church will follow Jesus best when her leaders look most like Him.

In Olympic and World Championship events, it is common to hear our fans chanting, U-S-A, much to the irritation of many others. We love to say and believe that we are #1. And at the moment we are, but not in a category that we are necessarily proud of as we currently lead the world in the number of recorded Covid-19 cases. The Covid-19 pandemic is providing many examples of good and bad leadership and will provide case studies for both for years to come. The stress of a crisis does not make someone a good or bad leader. The stress of a crisis is like a vice that reveals what is on the inside. Someone who leads well in a crisis does not wait for a crisis to lead, but is already leading in good ways. It's just that in times of crisis, the stakes are higher, so the implications of decision that leaders make are further reaching.

When life is going on fairly well, then we tend to think that we can, at least to a degree, ignore the quality of leadership around us. You may not like your sergeant. In fact, your sergeant may be a complete idiot, but as long as you are on base, his idiocy is a daily pain in the neck. But, if you are in battle and your sergeant is an idiot, well, now its a different matter. The guy may get you and everyone else killed. Being in battle reveals what kind of a leader he is with greater consequences. We are witnessing all sorts of examples of good leadership and bad leadership right now. But though this Covid-19 seems like a really big deal at the moment, those of you who are in high school and college are going to discover something. Many of you have spent your short lives rolling your eyes at the stories of hardship that your parents told you about. Guess what, your kids are going to do the same thing to you when you start in on the lockdown stories, then your kids are going to be rolling their eyes and saying, "Uhhh, hear we go with the Covid-19 stories again." And your parents want so desperately to be around when that happens. But that is a different matter...

The history of the church is the history of good leaders and bad leaders. When a church is blessed with a group of good leaders and that church knows it, and when those good leaders are blessed with a church full of godly and humble people, the synergy, the enjoyment, the trust, the love, the attraction is so beautiful, so compelling, so unusual- honestly, because you experience a freedom that allows you to live with your guard down, knowing that you are loved and knowing that you are free to love. It is so important, and sadly, rare, that you will never forget it. But, that is what the life of a church is intended to look, feel and smell like. That right there church is worth pursuing and it is worth protecting because life together like that is a taste of what life will be like forever! It will be intoxicatingly glorious. Our mission is to help one another look like Jesus and the leadership of a church is designed by Christ to set the mark, so that the church can keep the pace.

As I read and read the book of Acts in preparation for this series, I knew that chapter 20 would be very important for us. We've sort of dropped anchor here because the fishing is really good and I am in no hurry of moving on. Our text this morning is verse 28, but let's get a running start to remind ourselves of the context. (Explain)

Read Text: Acts 20.17-28

When I was cutting my teeth in ministry, I was exposed to and influenced by the ministry of James Montgomery Boice. James helped lead a recovery of the doctrine of inerrancy and as an outgrowth of that, was an excellent model and champion of expositional preaching. There were other things, but I looked at this man as a model of pastoring, preaching, leading, and as a husband and father and I wanted you to meet him. I always want you to meet people that I think you would love. James was pastoring the historic 10th Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, there were many demands on his time, but I thought it was worth a shot to see if I could convince him to come here and preach. So, I invited him to come on a Friday night. And he agreed. I was shocked, but very excited. But, James never came. A few months after accepting the invitation, he was diagnosed with cancer. He declined quickly and died. He meant so much to pastors like me and I wondered why the Lord took him. It seemed to me that there were plenty of people in this world who would help the world out by NOT being here, know what I mean? Why him? We needed him. He did so much. What a loss! That is the sentiment in this meeting here in Acts 20. Paul meant so much to these men. Now, I was never on the bench with James Boice. I was simply a fan in the stands. But, these elders from Ephesus had been in the trenches with Paul. I mean if Paul had the coronavirus, they would all have been sick. And now, he is telling them that he is not going to see them again, and I am sure they were wondering how they were going to get along without him. The answer was and is, you have to step up. And by God's grace, you can.

The obvious challenge and obvious application of this text is for the leaders, but leaders come from a congregation. Leaders are raised up by, cultivated by, and grown in the greenhouse of congregational life. Think about that. What kind of leaders do we need to raise up? What kind of leaders do we need to grow? We will grow the kind of leaders by the kind of congregation that we are. If you want faithful, humble, godly, kind, theologically astute leaders, then that is the kind of congregation we ought to be. It is very likely that the next senior pastor of this church is a member of our congregation. What do you want him to be like? We need to be growing him now. So, this text is what we expect our leaders to be and we help them become that by being a congregation that esteems that. The qualities that form the challenges of v.28 are to be qualities that we expect from our leaders, by encouraging them and providing on going examples of them.

Here is what healthy church leadership looks like - v.28

1. **Leaders who are Self-aware** - "pay careful attention to yourselves"

This is the heart of leadership isn't it? We all know that we have to have leaders. Nations, schools, armies, families, cities, business, manufacturing companies, churches, hospitals, basketball teams and little leagues do not survive where everyone does whatever he wants to do, and makes up his own rules and then chooses in the moment whether or not to follow them. No, we all know that we have to have leaders, but what drives us crazy is leaders who are not willing to place themselves under the same laws they put upon others. It should be self-evident. Pay careful attention to yourself is a summary of Matthew 7.1-5 (explain). It is the same thing that Paul said to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4.16. "Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching." Watch your life and your doctrine. What does it mean to watch your life? It means to have an

honest assessment of yourself and most of us do not have that of ourselves on our own. We have hearts that lie to us. They either tell us that we are fine (which means that we don't need Jesus) or that we are so bad (that even Jesus can't help us). A true self-assessment starts with knowing that you have not arrived. You needed Christ for salvation and you need Christ to breathe, to live, to function. You cannot live your life on your own strength and you cannot care for the church relying upon your abilities or reputation.

This means that the leaders need to know, and I mean really know, that they are always in need of paying attention to their own souls. Just because you start well, doesn't mean that you will end well. Just because you have some victories, doesn't mean that you can let down your guard. Do we have to rehearse the life of Moses, Gideon, Samson, David, Solomon, Hezekiah and Josiah to realize that we really have feet of clay? What exactly does leadership mean? It means that we set the mark so that others can keep the pace. Therefore, we are to set the mark in paying careful attention to ourselves. What does that look like? It means that we have regular times when we are engaging with God.

Who knows you best? Who knows when you are being an idiot and can call you out on it? You need someone in your life who will do that because sometimes you act like an idiot. You need someone who can see right through you because there is stuff inside of you that isn't always pretty and it needs to be addressed. Leaders need to certainly have people like this in their lives, and for me, by God's grace it is my wife (and kids - Arianna story?). But God knows me better than she does. And God knows you better than anyone else does. That is why paying careful attention to ourselves starts with being in regular and good communication with God. Search me O God and see if there is any wicked way in me. Show me my blind spots that I can confess them and repent of them. Reveal to me where I think I am self-sufficient so that I can renounce my works-righteousness and cast myself completely upon your mercy. I need to think that way. I need to pray that way. I need to live that way, and so do you. All of our elders need to have that posture. Being an elder in this church is an honor, but it is not an honor that we flaunt, but one that humbles us. The heart of our responsibility is to set the mark of self-awareness.

But, notice that Paul speaks in the plural. The elders should not only be men who are aware of their own lives, but the elders need to be a group of men who are aware of their lives and aware of how they are perceived by the congregation. This text is all congregational. In order to pay attention well to the congregation (next point) the elders have to be men who pay attention to themselves and be humble enough to be open to assessment, observations and suggestions from others. Cornerstone, this is so very important. I know that you are products of the west. You are used to be catered to. You were raised where the customer is always right. You are the consumer. Go where you find the best deal. Loyalty is only as deep as the next sale, the next experience, the next "at bat." Churches act like restaurants, rolling out the special for the day and catering to the whimsical tastes of a fickle public. I want you to learn to reject all of that. I want you to learn what a true church is supposed to be. I want you to learn to get under the skin of the programs and beyond the graphic design of the website, the grandeur of the architecture, the impressiveness of the ceremonies, the style and sophistication of the music and the set design of the platform. What are the leaders like? How do they relate with one another? Are these humble men who live with a profound awareness of how much they need God?

How does self-awareness point us to Christ?

2. **Leaders who are Involved and organized** - “and to all the flock”

The elders, (v.17) are also called overseers here in v.28. Taken together these terms, as Benjamin Merkle says, refer to “one who has the responsibility of safeguarding or seeing to it that something is done in the correct way.” In Ephesians 4.11, Paul refers to this position as shepherds and in 1 Peter 5.1-2, Peter basically takes all of these terms and combines them together when he says, “So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder . . . shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight.”

Shepherding demands personal involvement. A shepherd has to smell like the sheep. A shepherd has to know his sheep by name and the sheep have to be so accustomed to the voice of the shepherd that they respond to him when he calls. The Shepherd cannot be a stranger who is inaccessible to the flock. At the same time, this is not a responsibility that rests on one shepherd. Paul is talking to the Elders (plural). There is wonderful wisdom in sharing the shepherding of the congregation with the elders, so that the flock is given the attention that she ought to have. And, let’s be clear. There is no substitute for personally caring for the members of the flock. But notice that Paul tells the Elders to pay attention to “all the flock.”

So, let me ask some obvious questions. Are these elders from Ephesus responsible for the members of the church in Jerusalem? Antioch? Thessalonica? Corinth? NO! They are responsible for the flock in Ephesus. How do they know who the flock is? Do you see my point? These elders could not obey this command unless they had a means of knowing who was in their flock. Sometimes people say, “I don’t see church membership in the Bible.” And I say, “it’s all over the place” because you cannot carry out the responsibilities of the church unless you know who is in and who isn’t. That is why elders have to be involved and organized. I think that most of you know that we seek to maintain a current membership. If someone moves away, we cannot fulfill our responsibility to pay attention to them and care for them because we cannot be involved in their life. And if someone moves away, they cannot fulfill their responsibility to be involved in the lives of this church. If someone chooses to stop attending and being involved, then we cannot say with any confidence that they are following Jesus well. We don’t know. I think you can see that membership matters IF a church takes its calling serious to care for the flock. If we are simply a collection of programs for different age groups, and a variety of service options for whatever taste you have, then we are a religious cruise ship masquerading as a church. But, if we are a flock, that means that we are involved with each other. And that brothers and sisters is a two-way street. We have 15 elders who care for this flock. I would love to see us have 30. But, these men love you, pray for you and seek to care for you. But, you need to do your part. If an elder attempts to contact you, respond! Don’t make him do all the work, you are part of this church too. Reach out to him. Stay in touch with him. Pray for him.

How does involvement and organized point us to Christ?

3. **Leaders who are Called** - “which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers”

The life of a church is congregational. The Spirit works through the people. The leaders (elders) have the enormous and wonderful responsibility of teaching, preaching and equipping the congregation to think like, look like, act like, and smell like Jesus. Ephesians 4.12 says that our mission is to equip the saints for the work of the ministry. So, yes, the Spirit is certainly at work in the lives of the leaders, but ultimately it is the congregation that embodies the real life of the church. When the congregation is serious about following Jesus and is unified in that mission and is seeking God, then the actions of the congregation have an authority that is weighty. When you vote to elect elders, you are participating in a sacred task. And when an elder is elected into this role, he is to take this as a calling from the Holy Spirit.

Mercenaries are soldiers who fight on the side that pays them the most. Hirelings are herdsman who will work because of the paycheck, but if a lion comes, the hireling is gone. But a shepherd, an elder is called and even though he may not know how to respond perfectly in every situation, he does not run or leave, because the Spirit who put him in that role will equip him for it. Being an elder is not for guys who are on an ego trip. It has to be a calling revealed through qualification. One of those qualifications is loving.

How does being called point us to Christ?

4. **Leaders who are Loving** - “to care for the church of God”

Do you think that it is possible that one of the reasons why some people struggle so much with the idea that God is love, is because they have never really experienced being loved by the leadership in their church? Fear is a very effective source of motivation. If you can get someone to fear you, they will probably do what you tell them. Shame is also very effective. If you can threaten someone with embarrassment, you will probably get them to do what you want them to do. But, is fear and shame effective for a long-term, satisfying, joyful relationship? No! Fear and shame are not very sticky. Do you want to spend eternity in a relationship with God that is dominated by fear and shame? Of course not, that would be hell, even if there were golden streets and mansions all over the place. God delights in his children. God loves his kids. Therefore, leaders have the incredible and beautiful responsibility of giving the church a taste of God’s love. Why are leaders to care for the church of God? It is because God cares for the church. God loves the church. God loves the church so much, he sent Jesus to secure her!

5. **Leaders who know they are Accountable** - “which he obtained with his own blood”

A number of years ago, someone stole a keyboard from our church. Jan, who played that particular keyboard was in a local music store where she saw a keyboard that looked very similar to the one that had been stolen. It was for sale as a used instrument. This particular model had a place where you could insert a disk for additional settings. She went over and pressed the eject button and out popped the settings disk that had “Cornerstone” written on it. Needless to say, we got our keyboard back. That keyboard belonged to us and therefore no one else had the right to do anything with it without our permission.

The same thing is true about the church. The church has been bought and paid for by Christ. “I paid for that. It’s mine.” I find it both fascinating and extremely comforting that in Isaiah 49.16

God says that he has engraved his children on the palms of his hands. That's the proof of ownership. That is the receipt not only of ownership, but the scars in his hands and side also demonstrate proof of payment. The implications for leaders is enormous. A healthy church is going to have healthy leaders and healthy leaders know that this is not their church. This flock belongs to Jesus. Jesus died on the cross to obtain them. That is, the death of Christ purchased the salvation of every single person who would ever believe in him. Therefore, Jesus is the founder and the foundation of the church. Leaders are not owners, but stewards. Leaders do not have authority to do whatever they want to do, but only have authority to the extent that they carry out their God-given authority. Leaders can only say what God has said and they need to say that; not less, but not more. Leaders cannot make up new definitions for marriage, gender, or sexuality because it fits in with what a broken and lost culture demands. The authority and endorsement of the church does not come from the culture, but from God. Leaders of the church will be accountable to the One who died for the church.

But, as serious as that is, and it is, it is also comforting. Because Christ died for me and he will keep me and the names of our elders and leaders are in his hand too. We also are part of the flock that Jesus died for. And there is no better place to be, but engraved on his hands. If you are engraved on his hands, it is because he has you in his heart. We may be tempted to say that in times like this, it is good to know. Actually, it is good to know at all times. It's just that at times like this we are simply more aware of how vulnerable we really are and how sufficient he is.

Two applications: 1) The church always needs godly leaders. Some of you need to take that seriously and prepare yourself. What if this pandemic wiped out 60% of our elders including most of our pastoral staff? That is not out of the question. You need to be ready to lead, or at the very least be ready to be trained to lead.

2) Are you in the flock?