

"Love and Justice"
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Matthew 5:13-16, Psalm 115:1

June 13, 2010
San Dimas Community Church, UCC

Today we give God thanks for our children and youth, and we celebrate the landmarks on their journeys of life and faith. It is a joy to recognize our graduating seniors, and seeing them gives us hope for our world's future. In their own unique ways they will be leaders in the communities, churches, and careers they choose in their futures.

A friend gave me a copy of a book, *Leadership on the Line*, and I would like to offer some insights from this book to our young people and to us as well.

Leadership is more than simply applying current knowledge to a specific problem to be solved. Leadership is about adaptive change, which means learning new ways, what some philosophers call "novelty." Facts are rather easy to come by these days with Google at our fingertips. What is much harder is the creation of new possibilities applied to what seem like impossible problems.

I remember one of my first classes in seminary 20 years ago. It was a Christian Education class for Youth, and the first night we were given a syllabus that we methodically went through with our teacher. And I was terrified. I realized that this syllabus was not about memorizing information; I realized that if I fulfilled what was on that syllabus, I would be changed into a different, a much better teacher, and I wasn't sure I was capable of that. Well, I did change, and I learned that leadership was about constant adaptive change.

Leadership requires much of us. "Even the word 'to lead' has an Indo-European root that means 'to go forth, die.'" (*Leadership on the Line*) But in the going forth we are given the opportunity to create, to form, to shape meaning, to give our all to something beyond ourselves.

I want to briefly mention two characteristics of leadership that this book considers, and they are characteristics of the leadership Jesus showed us and modeled for us to follow. The first has to do with justice. Leadership and justice go together and take many forms. This story is told in *Leadership on the Line*.

In the '30s and '40s, Hank Greenberg was a great baseball player. His stats were great. Yet, his last season he was dropped by the Detroit Tigers, for whom he'd played his whole career, and picked up by the Pittsburgh Pirates, who were at the bottom of the standings.

But timing is everything and the year was 1947, the year that Jackie Robinson broke the color line by signing with the Brooklyn Dodgers... . All around the league, fans and opposing players treated Robinson to vicious abuses.... but Greenberg [was] Jewish and had been subjected to considerable heckling in his own career.

The first day Jackie Robinson played in Pittsburgh, he heard the catcalls. Then he was forced to go back to first base after leading off, and he aggressively slid into Greenberg. "The crowd quieted. Ordinarily, a player in Greenberg's position might say something aggressive in return, even cast a menacing glance... . But Greenberg... in a simple gesture, leaned over, gave Robinson a hand, and helped him up.

"Everyone in the stands and on both benches could not help but notice. The next time Robinson got to first base, he and Greenberg chatted, Greenberg asking him whether he had been hurt on the earlier play, telling him not to pay attention to the razzing, and inviting him out to dinner that evening.

"Greenberg's gesture... put all on notice that Robinson was there to stay. If Robinson was OK with Greenberg, then he must be OK. A career's worth of home runs and RBIs gave him the credibility to make a difference to Robinson, baseball, and American society. The fans and his teammates took notice because the great 'Hankus Pankus,' as he was nicknamed, stood up for justice." (215-6) It was the same justice that was so important to Jesus who stood with the oppressed of his day and time.

Another quality of leadership is compassion, which we call love. The philosopher "Aristotle described God as 'the unmoved mover.' In contrast, the twentieth-century philosopher Abraham Joshua Heschel described God as 'the most moved mover.'" (234) I agree with Heschel.

God is moved by compassion, and scripture tells us that God clearly changes God's mind when overcome by love. Because we know you graduates, we know that your leadership will be motivated by compassionate hearts. I don't mean the superficial "hand-out" kind of compassion: I mean the thoughtful, discerning compassionate love, capable of seeing the big picture, capable of changing whole systems in which you work, worship, and live out your lives. Jesus was concerned that people had bread when they were hungry, but he was also concerned that the systems that caused their hunger be overthrown.

This anonymous saying was passed on to me and I offer it to you:

May you be blessed with discomfort at easy answers, half truths, and superficial relationships so that you will love deep in your heart.

May you be blessed with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that you will work for justice, equality and peace.

May you be blessed with tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation and war so that you will reach out your hand to comfort them and change their pain into joy.

May you be blessed with the foolishness to think that you can make a difference in the world so that you will do the things which others suspect cannot be done.

Steve Jobs, CEO of Apple, spoke one year to the Stanford graduating class. He said: "Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma--which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of other's opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary." Words we all might remember!

So today we remember the words of Jesus to let our lights shine. We are not to be timid, fearful, or complacent. We are not to hide who we are under a bushel: we are to shine with the light of the divine flowing through us for it is divine light that creation desperately needs. May we all, both youth and adults, be leaders with passion for justice and with great capacity for love, not for our own sakes, but for the glory of God!