**The Gateways to appropriate Leadership.**

**The Gift of Leadership**

Good morning! It’s the last of Nathan’s series which pick up on 5 aspects of the life of discipleship – following Jesus – revelation (responding to God’s self-disclosure), commitment (to each other), submission (to each other in love), discipline (Susan pickup up a couple of Christian’s disciplines last week). And Nathan has asked me to speak about Leadership. I don’t think I’ve ever preached on leadership before. To tell the truth I have mixed feelings about the word ‘leadership’. What’s your first take on it? Is ‘leadership’ a good or a bad word for you?

Let’s turn to someone nearby and take a moment to talk about that – top of head stuff?

**discuss**

If I was in Germany, speaking in German I would be asking people what they thought of the word ‘Fuhrer’. That’s the word for leader. And I think that’s partly my reaction to the word leader too. (I try not to call Nathan, Führer too much☺)

Actually I often wonder whether I am a little allergic to the language of leadership because of, you know, ***abuses*** of leadership **or** is it because my kids got swamped at school with talk about leadership till they could stand it no more? (does that still happen... ...?) Or is it **really** because I am secretly a closet individualist – and I just want my own world to myself....

This week I dipped into a new theology book by a Christian writer called Robert Montgomery. The book was called ‘Following the Human One’ – that was Jesus favourite name for himself, (usually translated “Son of Man”).

Montgomery begins by observing that the 3 religions that have spread most widely in the world have a key factor in common is that they have central human saviour figures as their founders. He goes on to comment that ‘humans need leaders and they usually recognise this fact’. He says (let’s read this in full):

This is consistent with my belief as a Christian that human beings are created to be attracted to other human beings (teens take note) and this helps to account for why God became incarnate in order to draw human beings into fellowship with the triune god. I believe that the love of God to which human beings respond is supremely expressed in the person and work of Jesus.

I think this is exactly right... The human brain does two things extraordinarily well, it anticipates and it imitates. We are always drawn to what others around us are doing and imitating them. We are like sponges from an early age. We are drawn to our mother’s faces. Humans are born dependent in a way that no other creature is. With these enormously plastic brains, we copy others, unconsciously, not just what they do but what they want. It’s well documented. At the very deepest level none of us is an island. We are drawn into community. And if we are to act together we tend to act by following leaders.

It’s just human. Copying is OK. We all do it even if we don’t like to admit it. We are hardwired for it.

God become human... because humanity is not changed by ideas alone, by words in our heads, but by imitation, by human relations. god became human, so that we might become truly human, divine even, but in the way we are created, the way our brains are wired to work.

So maybe I’m just a typical western individualist – embarrassed about following any leader. Maybe I just haven’t come to terms with fact that being part of a herd is part of the human condition.

But there’s another thing about leadership we need to get our heads around – or at least I do.

Some people are natural leaders. You can probably think of some. they have what Maori call ‘mana’. It’s something about them... and people follow. So there’s this *informal* kind of leadership. And then there’s *official* leadership. When we all agree to give someone a role. We all agree that Mel is the Children and Family work leader

Hopefully these two things (informal and formal kinds of leadership) come together. But they don’t always.

Take Jesus for example:

And the thing about Jesus’ leadership is that he was never official. He was the leader from nowhere. He came from Nazareth of all places. His followers called him Rabbi but he had not credentials. He challenged hierarchy. His vision of God challenged hierarchy. In response to those who called their leaders Rabbi and Father he said, “Call no man Father. Call no man Rabbi.” He just called himself ‘the human one’. He was also a major critic of the religious leaders of his own time. He slammed the Pharisees and so on.

He did relational leadership. He spent his ministry making disciples of those around him but he didn’t do so with official support. He was the leader from nowhere.

So what do we do with institutional leadership, when Jesus was such a critic? Some would say Christians ought to be anarchists.

I’ll leave you to think about that one... I don’t think Jesus’ criticism of the existing leadership of his time is the *whole story*.

To clarify this I us to turn our attention to the obvious leader person in the NT... If you’re a Catholic you’ll know whom I’m referring to. Clue: It ain’t Paul... and it ain’t Jesus either. It’s not even Mary

show image: ‘aint Peter’s church’

We read before: “You are Peter (Rock) and on this rock I will build my assembly and the gates of Hades shall have no power against it.”

So Jesus may be the leader from nowhere, but he is building an assembly... same word as for synagogue... but it’s (and this is key) he building a *new kind* gathering of people... later they used the word ‘ekklesia’ (church). Jesus is going to build a community of people on Peter I want to same more about the ***new kind*** of community in a moment. But the logic of leadership means that communities are build by people, around people, they don’t just happen.

Fast forward to the story of Peter’s great failure. When he denies Jesus. Do you remember how it goes? Jesus on trial. They are warming their hands around the fire. And a servant girl and others come up to Peter. And ask him two things. Remember what?

A: Weren’t you with Jesus the Nazarean? Aren’t you one of them?

Matthew has Jesus twice and them (the community) once. Luke has Jesus once and the Community twice. But what struck me was: at the centre of Peter’s failure was not just denying Jesus, but also denying ***the community*** that Jesus was creating.

You are Peter and on this rock I will build my assembly. And now his temptation (kairos moment) is to deny the people he is called to. Do you know that temptation? Do you feel this embarrassment about ***your*** community (even *this* community). When you’re at a party and someone says ‘are you one of *them*?’...

Perhaps you also have felt God tapping you on the shoulder about some kind of leadership in the community ... and you feel like Moses (the guy who had no public speaking skills), like Amos (the shepherd boy, the nobody), like David (a youngest child, forgotten in the family lineup). In the Biblical stories that’s the normal thing, people who think they have nothing to offer are dragged kicking and screaming into leadership.

Fast forward again: By the lake in the morning of the resurrection Jesus asks him three times ‘do you love me’. And then three times about *the people*. **Feed my sheep**... It’s back to his first ‘calling’ for Peter. Not only do you love *me*... but do you love **the community that you are called to**.

Perhaps you do love this community ... in informal ways (that God has gifted you with). But what about formal leadership? If you love this community (someone described the church as the only community that doesn’t exist for its own members but for others) if you love *this* community, will you be accountable to it, in a formal way that everyone acknowledges?

To go back to my issues with leadership. Jesus may have been a critic of certain kinds of leadership, but he called Peter to a key role. I think the main idea is that it is a role in a new *kind* of community (not leadership as we know it). A new kind of community requires a new kind of leadership – the kind that provides food when folk are hungry, spiritually and physically, the kind that wields a towel for washing feet. Like Downton Abbey turned upside down. In this new community, it’s the butlers and the cooks that are the true leaders. In the church we need to be very wary of modelling our leadership on other institutions. Napolean, Caesar, Rob Muldoon and Donald Trump are not models of leadership in the community Jesus is creating.

So *is* God tapping you on the shoulder? Not just loving your neighbour, not just loving your enemy, but also loving the new community of Jesus you are a part of? That’s the question I want to invite you to think for a moment: There are many kinds of leadership in the community. The place to start is, I think, to talk to someone like Nathan, or someone on Parish Council about it or just someone else you trust in the community. You see if you really love the community you’ll be keen to submit your own sense of God’s calling to their discernment also. That’s how it works. Mutual submission is one of those dimensions of discipleship we have been talking about.

Let’s take a moment in silence to wait for God and listen and be still.