

18th February 2018

Leadership in the Old Testament 2.

1 Samuel 16.1-13

There has been shock and disbelief this week that aid workers for Oxfam used aid money to hire prostitutes whilst working in Haiti in the middle of the earthquake disaster a number of years ago. Since that revelation other aid agencies have had to come clean with accounts of other indiscretions by members of their staff over the years. It has obviously done harm to their public reputation and may have repercussions on public support for their work. Others have used the revelations for calls to cut foreign aid.

When I first heard the story, my initial reaction was:
Shock, Horror! – charity employs sinners!

In the church, we have had to cope with enough scandals and revelations of things like affairs and child abuse to know that those who hold positions of trust and care often fall short of the standards expected for those in such positions. We, of all people, because of our faith and understanding of fallen humanity, should not be surprised.

Our faith tells us that we are all sinners, even if we work for charities. We all have a bias in our nature that makes all of us fall short of the glory of God. Some, sadly, by a long way.

On our first Sunday in lent we are reminded that Jesus was tempted in the wilderness by the devil but did not succumb to those temptations to betray his calling and identity as the Son of God and the task he had come to do, to give his life for the world. The bible says there is only one person without sin. His name is Jesus. (Roms 3.23; Heb 4.15). One person out of billions of human beings.

Get a reality check. No matter how many policies, DBS checks, vetting procedures, performance management strategies you have, some people will mess up. If you employ thousands of people you are statistically certain that someone will do something bad, really bad. That's not to condone what they do, it's just to be realistic that we are all sinners.

So, I hope when people calm down and look at reality, then they will still support the likes of Oxfam and Christian Aid because they do good work, and foreign aid is important if you want to help people in desperate circumstances. If you're a Christian you realize that charity doesn't begin at home it begins when there is need,

when your neighbour is dying, because we are all children of God, our home is not limited by national boundaries.

I don't for one moment want to make light or excuse the abuse and sense of betrayal when people in positions of trust and care betray that trust and care. Victims are all around us. The conviction of the football youth coach Barry Bennell brought forward brave survivors to confront his abuse. It is terrible when leadership goes wrong.

We are looking at the topic of leadership this month and leaders by the very nature of being leaders, are people that others look to for a lead. When their lifestyles contradict the nature of their office people will lose trust in them and question their integrity.

I realised at an early age the pressures of leadership and the importance of integrity. Nearly thirty years ago I had come to the point of candidating for the Christian ministry. I had a very supportive church and a minister I respected who had given me encouragement to take this step. But then our church minister was discovered having an affair with one of his elders. His wife and three young children were distraught and as an elder in the church I was caught up in sorting out the aftermath of these revelations. In other jobs your private life usually doesn't affect your public life and your employment. Not so in church

ministry when character and integrity are vital aspects of leadership. It was a hard lesson for me and a sharp reminder at the outset of the cost and hazards of the course of life I was being called to undertake.

Most biblical characters, as I said last week, have their character flaws and the Bible doesn't airbrush those flaws out. God still uses them despite their fallenness and their sin. Which hopefully is an encouragement to us all. We don't have to be perfect for God to use us.

The Old Testament character we look at today, certainly wasn't perfect. David, was a great man. He had a heart for God. When he was selected by the prophet Samuel to be anointed as the next king of Israel, God told Samuel not to look on the external appearance, because God sees into the heart.

Although ironically David, the shepherd boy, when brought before Samuel is described as glowing with health, and had a fine appearance and handsome features. So, he ticked both boxes: outward appearance and inward disposition.

But most importantly his heart was in the right place. It's a saying that is often brought out when people make a mess of things.... But his or her heart was in the right place. They had the best intentions and still do, but they messed

up. Can we forgive them and give them a second chance? Some leaders who mess up are rehabilitated and given a second chance. Others aren't. I think a lot of that is whether people see remorse, repentance and a desire for a clean heart.

David messed up as king and leader of ancient Israel. He got another man's wife, Bathsheba, pregnant and had her husband put in the front line of battle so that he was killed and David could take his wife. You can read about it in 2 Samuel 11-12. Nathan the Prophet confronted his king with his sin and David was convicted to the heart.

'I have sinned against the Lord' he cried. And he had a long fast and put on sackcloth and ashes. His broken heart and sorrow for his sins restored his relationship with God and was enough to restore him to leadership although there were tragic consequences of his actions, as there always is with adultery and betrayal.

Psalms 51, often used on Ash Wednesday, is traditionally taken as written by David and expresses his remorse and desire to start again:

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.

² Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.

Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

¹¹ Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.

¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

David's reaction to his adultery proves that his selection as leader because his heart was in the right place, was justified. There is no avoidance of blame here in his adultery. No excuses or self-justifying explanations: 'I'm a man what do you expect?' 'Monogamy is so old fashioned'; 'they say affairs are good for you and can spice up your relationships' – and all the other drivel people use to justify their actions. David just says I have sinned. He had a heart for God and was aware of the offence to God's laws he had done and was sincerely sorry. So, restoration was possible.

Our lent course has many testimonies of prisoners and ex-offenders. They testify to how change is possible in their lives, through God's grace and strength. It is very moving and encouraging to read how God brought change in their lives and usually it only happens when they accept

responsibility for their actions and admit they have sinned. Only then is their heart in a right place before God. Only then is their heart ready to receive grace and mercy and the cleansing God can bring to the soul through his Holy Spirit.

Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

If you are in that situation, wracked with guilt, needing forgiveness and restoration: that's the only prayer you can pray. None of this: 'let me explain myself, it wasn't really my fault...'

The Lent Course is a study in forgiveness and hope and how we find it through Christ. I commend the course to you. Do join us on Thursday nights.

But it wasn't only a heart for God that made David a great leader.

He had a lot of things going for him: talent, humility, courage and vision. But he also surrounded himself with strong people and a team from which they were able to achieve greatness. Like the potential of any other strong leader, David's potential was determined by those closest to him.

When David was on the run and Saul was determined to kill him, his future looked bleak. He was hated and hunted. But everything changed for him the day he met Jonathan. Jonathan became a close friend of him, protecting and hiding him and assisting in many ways, especially emotionally. As he was being hunted David started drawing to himself supporters. People who were in debt, distress or discontented were drawn to him rather than to the ruling king Saul. David became their captain. His father and brothers joined him. He transformed them all into a winning team. Securing victories over the Philistines, Geshurites, Girizites and Amelakites (1 Samuel 27)

This great warrior, remember his most famous fight – against Goliath as a small shepherd boy armed only with courage, faith in God and a sling with a few pebbles, David could mentor and inspire his team to become as good or better than he was. By the time he ascended the throne he had developed a strong inner circle of people he could trust and rely on. With these people he was able to subdue his enemies and put into place a structure to keep his kingdom stable. He placed garrisons in enemy territory to ensure security. The conquered lands paid tribute. Once he had all that in place he turned his attention to setting up an administration with an emphasis on justice (2 Sam

8.15) to do what was good and right. When leaders are seen to do what is good and right they command respect from their people. Goodbye and good riddance to Jacob Zuma.

In the business world there is a renewed emphasis on team leadership. Why? Because nobody does everything well.

A team is more than just a group of people. Mother Teresa said ‘You can do what I cannot do. I can do what you cannot do. Together we can do great things’. Every good leader needs a team of people. There should be no ‘Lone Ranger’ leaders. Think about it: if you’re alone, you’re not leading anybody, are you? I’m old enough to remember the Lone Ranger on the TV. Saturday morning black and white TV. Problems were always solved in the same way. The Lone ranger and his faithful companion Tonto, would come riding into town. (the lone ranger on his horse Silver). The Lone Ranger with his mask and mysterious identity, background and lifestyle, never becomes intimate with those whom he will help. His power is partly his mystique. Within ten minutes the Lone Ranger has understood the problem, identified who the bad guys are, and has set out to catch them. He quickly outwits the bad guy and has him behind bars. And then there is that wonderful scene at the end where the helpless victims are

standing in front of their ranch or town square marvelling at how wonderful it is now that they have been saved.

What a load of baloney! There should be no lone ranger leaders. Leadership expert Warren Bennis maintains that ‘The leader finds greatness in the group, and he or she helps the members find it in themselves’.

David surrounded himself with a strong inner circle that displayed the following characteristics, which are essential for a good team:

First of all, they accepted the delegation of duties.

It has been said that a good leader never puts off till tomorrow what he or she can have someone do today. David had no trouble delegating to his leaders. Scripture contains several lists of people who were part of David’s inner circle. (2 Sam 8.16-18; 20.23-26; 1 Chron 18.14-17). David attracted people with varied gifts, from combat to administration. As they used those gifts for the great good of the team they did great work. He delegated responsibility based on ability.

Delegating authority is always a risky thing for leaders to do. It can cause problems, particularly mistakes in judgement or the abuse of power, or ineffectiveness. People are asked to do something but they don’t do it or

do it badly. But great leaders risk delegation in order to reach the highest level of leadership. Unlike his predecessor, Saul, David, didn't try to do it all himself, and as a result, he was able to do things no leader before him had done.

Secondly, they were loyal. David engendered loyalty. For example, he stated one day he was thirsty for a drink from the well in Bethlehem and three of his men risked their lives to get him some of that water. Decades after when David's son Absalom, committed treason against him and it looked like David may be defeated, his closest men stayed by him. Ittai the Gittite said 'As surely as the Lord lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king may be, whether it means life or death, there will your servant be.' (2 Sam 15.21). It wasn't uncritical loyalty however because:

Thirdly they were people of character. Like David, their heart was in the right place.

Highly talented people surrounded David. This makes sense because he was highly talented – like attracts like as they say. But David's inner circle didn't have value just because of what they could do. They had value because of who they were. Again, it was back to the heart: people's inner qualities as much as what they actually do. This is

sometimes difficult because we often tend to focus on productivity and results. But what's on the inside really matters. Which arguably is where our education system is going wrong – because all the focus is on results and productivity and not character.

Nathan the prophet was a man of great character who never cringed in fear when his king did wrong. Instead he spoke out. And for that David was grateful. David knew through Nathan, that repentance opened the door for restoration to God. Nathan had the character and the right motives, because his heart was in the right place, to confront his leader about his transgressions.

Finally, they worked together as a team.

They say team mates complete one another – not compete with one another. The Basketball coach John Wooden once observed 'the main ingredient of stardom is the rest of the team'. He was a team building coach and his basketball teams won a remarkable ten national championships during his career. He looked for players who would make a team, rather than individual stars.

Team work makes the dream work.

Jesus was tempted by the Devil with popularity, superiority and success – all without depending on others

or the cost of service. Yet he turned to the sustenance of ministering angels. Lent is a good time to remember that we are dependent on someone other than ourselves and we live by inexplicable gifts that show up in our times of wilderness. Cherish your angels.

A group of people doesn't become a team without leadership and a strong inner circle doesn't form itself. It takes a leader to do it. David was a team building leader.

When God desires a leader to do something of value He provides the people needed to get the job done. That was true for David and will be true for us. You just got to look around.

Is your heart in the right place? Are you in a right relationship with God? Lent is as good a time as ever to pray 'create in me a clean heart O God and renew a right spirit within me'

Do you find yourself in a team? Whether at work or in a voluntary organisation, or church. Can you use your gifts not in competition, but to complete others, to be the kind of person trusted with delegated tasks, to be a person who is loyal and with character?

In the words of Psalm 51: 'May God grant you a willing spirit to sustain you and restore to you the joy of your salvation.'

Bibliography:

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