**4th March 2018**

**John 2.13-22; 1 Corinthians 1.18-25**

This morning we finish off a series looking at the theme of leadership. So far in the last month we have looked at servant leadership, leading not for what’s in it for you but leading for others; we have looked at the lives of two Old Testament leaders Elijah and David and reflected on their strengths and weaknesses in leadership; last week Joan looked at Leadership in the New testament.

This week I’m going to focus on three things: The courage, cost and sacrifice of leadership; the focus of leadership; the legacy of leadership.

The American evangelist Billy Graham, one of the most important religious leaders of the past century, died a week ago aged 99.

In a career spanning more than 60 years, he is believed to have preached to hundreds of millions of people in what he called his "crusades". I heard him speak twice. The first time was on the 2nd March 1982 at Blackpool Winter Gardens. Burley drew 1-1 with Walsall in our third division championship winning season – but I missed the game to go on a coach run by our church to hear Billy Graham speak. I responded to his call to receive Christ into my life at the end of his talk, which is why I remember the date.

Billy Graham had a simple message: he told you what the problem of the world was and your part in it. He told you what God’s solution was, then he asked for your personal response. His approach has been criticized as simplistic and psychological manipulation. His style is anachronistic today – there are hardly any big evangelistic rallies now in Britain. You can’t imagine a Mission England event where a Billy Graham like figure would draw tens of thousands to football stadiums around the country to hear the gospel, as I went for a second time to Sheffield United’s ground in 1985. If we do evangelism, and for many churches that’s still a banned topic, then it tends to be process evangelism like the Alpha Course, giving people a non-pressured environment to weigh up the claims of the Christian faith over a process of meetings. Or friendship evangelism, just inviting someone to come along with you to church.

To be honest I went forward that night to get people from my church off my back. They had been pressing me about a Christian commitment so I had decided to go forward and make a public statement whatever Billy Graham said. I was a miserable resentful convert. It took me two years to get beyond the fear of the Lord to experience the joy of the Lord.

I still however think there is a place for a public confession of faith in Christ. Like a marriage service you declare before others your change of status. It’s a big step and you go public, so that no one is in any doubt. On Easter Sunday seven people will become church members here and they will all go public with their Christian faith. We hope the experience will strengthen them as much as it will strengthen us. They are not ashamed to call Jesus Christ their Lord.

Billy Graham had the courage to take the gospel to all sorts of places, including the old Soviet Union and Communist China and even to North Korea. He was an early crusader for civil rights.At a time of racial segregation in the US, Graham said he would not speak before segregated audiences in the 1950s, and often spoke of the need for inclusion.

At one event in Tennessee in 1953, he moved ropes that divided black and white members of his audience.

"Christianity is not a white man's religion and don't let anyone tell you it's white or black," he told an audience in South Africa in 1973. "Christ belongs to all people."

Graham was also a close friend of Martin Luther King Jr, and once paid his bail when King was arrested at a demonstration in 1960.

He knew the cost of leadership and knew his life was not his own but lived in the public gaze. He adopted what was known as The Billy Graham rule. This was guidance on how to avoid even a hint of impropriety around women. He did not travel, meet or eat alone with a woman other than his wife." There was no need for #MeToo campaign around Billy Graham.

But it came at the cost of his own personal freedom.

Billy Graham had a focus for his leadership. He just wanted to preach the gospel and bring people to Jesus. He said he regretted his involvement in politics.For decades, Graham was a fixture of the White House and acted as an unofficial counsellor to presidents - Time journalist Nancy Gibbs once wrote that "he came with the office like the draperies".

While he tended to steer clear of endorsing candidates, he ended up becoming close friends with a number of presidents, in particular Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon.

Graham's relationship with Nixon even went as far as him advising the president on what action to take in Vietnam. He later supported Nixon throughout his scandals, but went on to denounce him.

In a 2011 interview with Christianity Today, Graham said he wished he had not become as involved in politics.

"I'm grateful for the opportunities God gave me to minister to people in high places; people in power have spiritual and personal needs like everyone else, and often they have no one to talk to," he said. "But looking back I know I sometimes cros­sed the line, and I wouldn't do that now."

His son Franklin asked him just recently what he would like engraved on his tombstone. Billy Graham said just one word: preacher.

Finally, Billy Graham left a great legacy. He is reputed as having spoken to 215 million people. When I asked those gathered at the United Lent Service last Sunday evening who had been to a Billy Graham meeting half of the fifty or so people present put their hand up. Many of those, like me, went forward at one of his meetings to publicly commit their lives to Christ. What a great legacy.

Great leadership has the courage to make a sacrifice, is focused on its goals, and leaves a legacy.

In our scripture passages Jesus comes to the temple in Jerusalem and drives out the money changers. He says stop turning my Father’s house into a market. The money changers often charged exorbitant rates for people needing to buy sacrifices for their sins. It was a flourishing business and a rip off. And it all took place where the Gentiles were trying to worship. Jesus got angry at the dishonest, greedy practices of those who had turned God’s temple into a market place and where making a profit out of a place of worship. Jesus anger was a righteous anger at injustice and sin and the commodification of worship and access to God. Like Billy Graham taking a stand at social conventions preventing black people from being integrated into worship with whites Jesus had the courage of conviction to make a stand. But it would lead to trouble and ultimately sacrifice. Jesus would pay with his life.

Next Month will mark the 50th anniversary of the death of Martin Luther King, who led the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. Each time King made a stand for civil rights the greater the price he paid for it. He received death threats, arrest, beatings, bombings and ultimately assassination. But his impact and his legacy was profound. He influenced millions of people to peacefully stand up against a system and society that fought to exclude them.

There is a common misperception among people who aren’t leaders that leadership is all about position, perks power that come from running an organisation or movement. Many people today want to climb the corporate ladder because they believe that freedom, power and wealth are the prizes waiting at the top. The life of a leader can look glamourous on the outside. But the reality is that true leadership requires sacrifice. A leader must give up to go up. In recent years we’ve observed more than our fair share of leaders who have abused their positions for personal benefit resulting in scandals of greed and selfishness that have discredited their office and increased resentment and cynicism from those they were supposed to lead.

The heart of good leadership is sacrifice.

If you desire to become the best leader you can be, then you need to be willing to make sacrifices in order to lead well. There is no success without sacrifice. Think about those Olympians at the Winter Olympics. Athletes sacrifice countless hours practicing and trying to perform at a high level. Parents give up much of their free time and sacrifice in order to do a good job raising their children. Many working people dedicate hours and money to attend college to get the training and qualifications they need to embark on a chosen career. Philosopher poet Ralph Waldo Emerson observed: ‘for everything you have missed, you have gained something else; and for everything you gain, you lose something. Life is a series of trades, one thing for another.

Leaders are often asked to give up more than others. The heart of leadership is putting others ahead of yourself. its doing what is best for the team. Gerald Brooks said, ‘when you become a leader, you lose the right to think about yourself’. You give up your rights in exchange for more responsibilities. When you have no responsibilities, you can pretty well do anything you want. Once you take on responsibilities you start to experience limitations in what you can do. Your time is no longer your own. Every decision you make will be questioned. Your family may be put under pressure. Every statement you make may be scrutinized. For every person this sacrifice may be different. For some, like Martin Luther King and Jesus, they gave their actual lives. Leadership means sacrifice. There is always a cost in going forward. There is no success without sacrifice.

Like Billy Graham, Paul in his letter to the Corinthians says that ‘*Jews demand signs, Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified; a stumbling block for the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of god and the wisdom of God*.’

Paul gave leadership that was solely focused on extending the gospel and calling men and women, Jews and gentiles to the cross of Christ. He had a strategy for making the gospel and his preaching effective. He was a leader who looked to develop leaders. Leaders who develop followers grow their organisation only one person at a time. But leaders who develop leaders multiply their growth, because for every leader they develop, they also receive all that leader’s followers. Add ten followers to your organization and you have the power of ten people. Add ten leaders to your organization and you have the power of ten leader’s times all the followers and the leaders they influence. The better the leaders you develop, the greater the quality and quantity of followers. The fascinating irony of leadership is that if you want to do something really big that involves a lot of people, you need to narrow your focus to a few people. That may not seem to make sense. But Paul was tasked with being the light to the Gentiles. Commissioned by Jesus to preach Christ crucified Paul was instrumental in getting the Christian faith spread throughput the Mediterranean world, establishing the early church in most countries. Great things aren’t achieved by the crowd, they’re accomplished by the core. If you think huge, you need to learn to act narrow.

Everywhere Paul went to preach he looked to appoint leaders of those embryonic churches. Think of Titus, Luke, Apollos, Timothy, Silas, Priscilla and Aquila, to name just a few mentioned in Paul’s letters who he selected for leadership roles. Those people he mentored and commissioned to pastor people and establish the community of faith in those places. He would write to those leaders, teach those leaders and look after those leaders, who in turn would look after those churches.

Focusing on leaders isn’t easy. Leaders are hard to find, hard to gather, and hard to hold. Where followers are waiting around looking for someone to lead them, leaders are out making things happen. Where followers readily fall in line behind a leader, other leaders need compelling reasons before they are willing to follow. Most organizations want stability. Leaders want excitement. Most organizations desire structure. Leaders want flexibility. Most organizations place a high value on following rules. Leaders want to think outside the box. If you want to gather leaders you must create a place where they can thrive. Leading other leaders is no easy task.

Paul in the start of this letter to the Corinthians talks about the conflicting claims of various leaders who want to lead the church in Corinth and Paul’s credentials to be their leader and his authority to do so. He bothered because he knew that the way to achieve his objective and focus of sharing the gospel to as many people as possible, entailed finding leaders and leading leaders who would multiply his leadership and also succeed him.

Final point about great leadership is that it looks to leave a legacy and successors. Great leaders work to make themselves dispensable. They raise up leaders to replace them. They don’t want to have a following; they want to leave a legacy. That’s what Paul valued. He developed leaders such as Timothy and Titus who would carry on after he was gone. He writes letters to them from prison awaiting his execution and they are full of hope and joy, because he knows that the gospel will continue because he can trust Timothy and Titus to that task.

Most people don’t think about the legacy they leave: for example what people are going to say about them at their funeral. Starting with the end can drastically affect your outlook on life: what you hope to achieve with your life, what you hope you leave behind. Someday someone will summarize your life in a few sentences. My advice: choose those words now!

Live the legacy you want to leave.

Jesus of course constantly predicted the outcome of his life and what he came to do and how he wanted to be remembered.

*The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.*

*I have come that you may have life, life in all its fulness.*

*I am the resurrection and the Life, those how believe in me will not die but will live.*

*I am the bread of life, those who believe in me will never go hungry*.

Etc etc..

They say that when all is said and done, your ability as a leader will not be judged by what you achieved personally or even by what your team accomplished during your tenure. You will be judged by how well your people and your organization did after you were gone. Your lasting value will be measured by succession. Are they able to do great things without you?

People believe in Jesus today and call him Lord because Jesus made it possible for the disciples to carry on his work and they in turn called and trained others to continue in their place.

Albert Makin was a farmer who became a Christian in the 1930s in the United States. He was so excited about his faith that he would fill his farm truck with friend’s and take them to hear the evangelist Mordecai Ham. There was one young man who he was desperate to try and get to come but the young man was too busy and distracted falling in and out of love and chasing the girls. So, he wasn’t particularly attracted to Christianity.

But Albert Makin had an idea. He persuaded the young man to come to church by asking him to drive the truck and suggested to him that there would be lots of attractive girls there. When they got there Alberts guest decided to go in and, in his own words, was spell bound. He went back again and again until one night he went to the front of the meeting and gave his life to Jesus Christ. The year was 1934. Since that day Albert’s guest has spoken to more than anyone else in history about Jesus Christ. The name of his guest was of course Billy Graham.

What a legacy Albert Makin left. What a legacy Billy Graham left. What a legacy the apostle Paul left. What a legacy Jesus left.

What will your legacy be?

If you are called to be leader consider the cost and sacrifice. Focus on your goals and what you want to achieve. Have an eye on tomorrow as well as today and the type of legacy you want to leave.

Mat God give you power and wisdom in His Service.

Bibliogrpahy

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