

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon Title: Follow the Leader

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Scripture: Luke 22:24-26

²⁴ A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest.

²⁵ And he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. ²⁶ But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves.

Transcript:

Well, hello, Bell Press. Hello, those of you in the room and those of you online. Sanctuary people, if you're just joining us, we're actually worshipping together here in the community center because our sanctuary is not air conditioned and it is unhealthy hot in there. It's a little glass terrarium with all kinds of heat. So we're all worshipping together here in the community center as one because it is air conditioned. It's great to have you joining us online or in this room. Lord, as we turn to your word, Holy Spirit, use what I'm going to say in these next few minutes, use what we're going to think in these next few minutes to help us live out of your word, and be able to say yes to you. We ask this in your name, Jesus. Amen.

Well, I want to start with a statement. You are a leader. Whether or not you think of yourself as a leader, you may not think of yourself as a leader, you may not feel like a leader, you may not even want to be a leader, too bad for you. God says you are a leader. And when we hear that word leader, we think of president or CEO or something like that. But really leadership is just another word for influence. Leadership is just another word for influence. And you and I are influencing people all the time in our daily lives every single day in the smallest of daily ways. For instance, let me give you a for instance. Let's say you are with a group of people at school or work or church or in a retirement community, and let's say you start to complain about something. Not that you would ever do that. You don't ever complain, but this is a hypothetical.

Let's say you start to complain about something and then someone else jumps in and adds their complaint to yours and then someone else, and pretty soon, you've got yourself a big old complaint-a-thon and you were the first person to complain. In that moment, you were a leader influencing people to go in a certain direction. Leading is just influencing. And now, of course, it can go the other way around. Maybe you're in a group of people and they're complaining and you suddenly change the subject to something a little more positive and they all follow your conversational lead. That's also leadership. It doesn't matter how old you are, whether you're a student or working or retired, you are leading, IE, you are influencing people every single day for good or for ill.

So as we go through this sermon talking about being leaders, I don't want you to think of CEOs or presidents. I want you to think, who are the people you're influencing or trying to influence? Friends, kids, parents, neighbors, people at work, school, in a retirement community, who are you influencing? In the passage we just read, Jesus is talking to his disciples about being leaders, and I think it's important to remember his disciples were all teenagers or young adults. So John, the youngest of the disciples, maybe was around 14 or 15 years old, and Jesus tells this group of teenagers that are his disciples that they are leaders. But he's going to define leader a little different than his culture or our culture. And actually his brand of leadership works a lot better than our brand of leadership. And our world is desperate for good leaders, because lots of stuff feels broken right now, doesn't it?

Our politics certainly feels broken. Families feel broken. Churches feel broken. Our culture feels broken. So for the next few weeks, we're going to do a sermon series called Lead because our world needs good leaders who influence people in positive directions to make a difference in our world, and you are that leader called by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit to transform the people and the places where you live, work, play, or learn. And yes, leadership can be hard, and yes, it can be very painful sometimes, but there are also huge rewards for getting to be part of what God is doing. We get to see miracles. We get to see God move. We get to see people's lives transformed. So what is a good leader? According to Jesus, what Jesus says to his teenage disciples, "Let the leader be as one who serves." Keyword there is, serves. Good leaders are servant leaders.

Now, that's a very trendy phrase these days, not just in churches. It's a trendy phrase, servant leader, in business, in education, in government, in all kinds of things. So what does that mean? What does it mean to be a servant leader? Well, let me start with what it does not mean. Servant leader is not about status or bossing people around. So the setting for this text that Brendan just read is The Last Supper and it's the night before Jesus is about to be crucified. His last supper, he's got his disciples with him, and in the middle of this supper, the text says, "A dispute arose among the disciples as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest." Are you kidding me? Seriously? This is the night before Jesus is going to be crucified. This is his hour of need and his best friends, what are they doing? They're just like, "I'm the greatest." "No, I'm the greatest." I mean, are you kidding me?

Now, maybe it wasn't that way. If we give them the benefit of the doubt, maybe they weren't saying, "I'm the greatest." Maybe they were humbly saying to each other, "No, you're the greatest." Maybe, just maybe, the other disciples said to Peter, "Peter, you're going to be the greatest." And Peter goes, "Yeah. Not me. Jesus is always having to correct me." And then maybe they say, "Well, Thaddeus, you're going to be the greatest," and Thaddeus goes, "No, no one even knows about me." And then maybe they say to Thomas, "Thomas, you're going to be the greatest," and Thomas goes, "I doubt it." See what I did there. That was so clever, wasn't it? Super clever. Maybe that's what they were doing. Maybe. How many of think that? Yeah, not so much. "No, I'm the greatest." "I'm the greatest." And what's going on here is they think Jesus is about to establish his earthly kingdom and they're all jockeying for position. "Who gets to be Vice Messiah?" "I'm the greatest." "I'm the greatest."

And what Jesus is going to say is, "Y'all are playing with the wrong definition of greatness and y'all are playing with the wrong definition of leading. The Kings of the Gentiles exercise Lordship over them, bossing people around. That's how it goes in every culture. That's how leadership goes in every culture. But not so with you." Servant leadership is not bossing

people around, but second, neither is servant leadership being a doormat. Yes, servant leaders serve the people they're leading, friends, coworkers, neighbors, family, employees, employers, but being a servant leader doesn't always mean giving people exactly what they want when they want it. Many of you have read the children's book, *The Giving Tree*, and just as a refresher, it's about a boy who loves to climb this tree, but then the boy grows up and becomes an adult. And he comes to the tree and he says, "I want some money." And the tree says, "Well, I can't give you any money, but you can take my apples and you can go sell the apples for money." So the boy does that.

Then a little while later, the boy's older, he's married now, and he says, "I want a house." And the Giving Tree says, "Well, I can't give you a house, but you can cut down my branches and you can build a house with my branches." And so the boy does that. Then a little while later, boy's midlife and now he comes back, I don't know, midlife crisis or whatever, and he says to the Giving Tree, "I want a boat," and the tree says, "Well, I can't give you a boat, but you can cut down my trunk and make a boat out of it." And so the boy does that. Then finally, at the end of his life, when the boy is old and tired, he comes and he sits on the stump of the tree, which is all that is left of the tree. That book is deeply disturbing. That is a deeply disturbing book right there. I'd like to rewrite it. The second time the boy comes back and asks for the branches for the house, the Giving Tree says, "No, you're enmeshed and codependent. Go do it yourself."

Servant leadership is not being the Giving Tree with no boundaries. That's called enabling, bad behavior. It should be called the Enabling Tree. It's bad for the boy to be exploiting the tree. It's turning him into a greedy, self-centered consumer. A servant leader loves people, and love means sometimes you have to say no to people for their own good or for the good of others. Servant leader is not bossing people around and it is not being a doormat. So then what is it? What is it? And, again, I want you to think about the people you're influencing every day or trying to influence. And are you leading them this way? Because influence, leadership, same thing. Well, first, servant leaders follow so hard after something that others follow them. So in other words, good leaders are good followers who are pursuing something with such passion that other people are just caught up in their enthusiasm and go along with them.

A great example of this is Dr. King, who so passionately pursued racial justice and reconciliation that other people just thought caught up in it and followed him as he followed that. And as Christians, our attitude should always be follow me as I follow Jesus. Second, servant leaders go first and they go most. At its most basic definition, a leader is just the person who's in front, the person who is first. So, as a leader, I know that anything I ask y'all to do, serve, give, forgive, love, I better be doing those things first and most as the leader and confessing to you the ways I fall short of that, because sometimes I do. Who are you influencing or trying to influence? Are you going first? Are you going most? Third, servant leaders sacrifice for a higher cause. A leader is willing to make huge sacrifices, anything to accomplish the goal, the vision, whatever will get it done. You see this in Jesus.

This is The Last Supper, first thing he does is he washes his disciples' feet to serve them. And then the next thing he's going to do, the next day, he's going to die on a cross to pay the just penalty for our sins so we could be reconciled to God. He sacrifices. So, for instance, what does this look like? One of the sacrifices leaders often need to make is to someone else gets the credit rather than them getting the credit. Because you can get a lot more done when you don't care who gets the credit? Jesus says, "The Kings of the Gentiles exercise Lordship over

them and those in authority over them are called benefactors." A benefactor is someone who does something good, who gives some money or give some service. But in the original Greek language that this was first written in, in the original language, when Jesus says, "are called benefactors," another way to translate it would be, "liked to have themselves called benefactors."

In other words, these are people who want credit for what they've done. And this is still going on. I mean, how do you think most universities get the names for their buildings? The largest donor. So you're walking by Smith Hall, someone named Smith gave a whole lot of money. Jesus says, "Not so you." So maybe you don't get the credit. But here's the payoff, here's the reward. Maybe we don't get the credit, but when you don't care who gets the credit, more things happen. Bigger things happen. God can do more through us. So let me give you an example. Jubilee Reach is an example of how we have done this as a church. We started it, but we did not put our name on it, and as a result, more is getting done. Changing kids' life, ending cycles of poverty. Most recently, providing for 700 families that have been hard hit by the pandemic, and many of you participated in that. Thank you.

And the families are so grateful. They're often in tears. Ken Carpenter, who leads the project and is a very good leader himself, always says, "The goal here is not to be transactional. It's to be in relationship with these families and learn from each other and support each other." So while families are waiting in line for groceries, volunteers will pray for the families. Often will pray with the families. They'll often say things like, "We're all members of the same community here and we're all the same children of God. And during this pandemic, some of us can give help, others of us need help, but we're all part of the same community and we need each other." One time Ken said a woman came up to him after he'd said that and said how meaningful it was for her to hear that. Because as an immigrant, sometimes she feels like she's less important than non-immigrants. So many lives are being changed through Jubilee Reach and 26 churches as well as rotary and Kiwanis clubs have all been a part of it.

It wouldn't have had that much impact if we had put our name on it, because then all those other organizations probably wouldn't have joined Jubilee Reach if it was a Bell Press thing and it had Bell Press' name on it. So by not getting the credit, when we don't take the credit, more is happening because we didn't get the credit for it. And our reward is we get to be part of the bigger things that God is doing, and that's just exciting. Another way leaders sacrifice is they make sure that they are going to sacrifice whatever they need to sacrifice for the people that they are leading to have the resources they legitimately need to succeed. Parents sacrifice time, energy, and money to help their kids thrive. Leadership is being willing to sacrifice anything regardless of personal likes or dislikes to do what needs to be done to accomplish the goal, to accomplish the vision, because servant leaders know it's not about them. It's not about what they want or don't want, what they like or don't like. It's not about them. It's about something bigger.

So let me give you a practical here. What might that look like in your life? Let me just throw out a couple of suggestions of what servant leaders sacrifice and what might sacrifice look like in your life. Well, maybe it is letting someone else get the credit for something at work or school. If that's going to make the project go better, or if that's going to create better team spirit and team unity. Maybe you don't get the credit. Maybe it's sacrificing your need to be right and losing an argument or being the first one to apologize, because that can change the atmosphere completely in a family, in a workplace, in a school, in a retirement community.

Maybe sacrificial leadership is turning down a promotion if it's going to be bad for your family, and that's a sacrifice, but the pay off, the reward is a better marriage and better connection with your kids.

One of the best ways leaders sacrifice to serve others is to welcome corrective feedback, welcome negative feedback in order to hold them accountable to being good leaders and to help them to grow. These things are sacrifices, but they can change the entire atmosphere of a church, a family, a workplace, a retirement community, which helps everyone thrive because there's just more joy in the world and if everyone is thriving, guess what? That means you're thriving too. You're a part of everyone. Servant leaders sacrifice. Fourth, and some are like, "What do you mean fourth? It's a Presbyterian sermon. There should be three. Just three. Aren't we done?" Well, here's the thing. I don't have any air conditioning at my house and this room is air conditioned so I'm going to preach for four and a half hours. And for those of you who don't have conditioning, that will be my sacrifice for you.

Fourth, servant leaders are humble. That means humble leaders are willing to learn from others. They don't always have to have all the answers. They're willing to let someone else shine if they know more than the leader. They're willing to let someone else be upfront if someone else should be upfront, because they know more or can do a better job. It means humble leaders don't feel like they have to make all the decisions. Because if there's someone better able to make a certain decision, servant leaders let that person make the decision because they're better qualified. There are a whole bunch of decisions around this church that you do not want me making. Trust me. You don't want me to deciding what AV equipment to buy. We'd be buying those little overhead projectors from the 70s. We're looking for a new organist. You don't want me to apply for that job. How hard can it be? You just press some buttons. A whole bunch of stuff I can't do here, I've got to let other people do it. Servant leaders are humble.

And that brings me to my last point, servant leaders are humble but they also know the power of one. One person can start a complaint-a-thon. One person can stop it. One person can change the atmosphere of a school, home, office neighborhood. We see this in worship services sometimes where there'll be this powerful moment in worship, a song, or something like that and it finishes and everyone wants to respond and should respond because worship is a response to the good news of Jesus, but everyone is afraid to, and they're like, "Should I clap? Do I say amen? I don't know what to do. What are the rules?" But then someone claps, and then pretty soon everyone else is clapping. Whoever that first person is to clap, you influenced a room full of people to respond to the good news of Jesus. And influence is just leadership. You were a leader in that moment.

I've had people in the past say, "There are points in your sermon, pastor, that I just wanted to shout out 'Amen!'" And I'll say, "Well, then why didn't you?" If you're happy and you know it, say "Amen!" Although I've got to say, I've noticed, I've commented on this a couple of times, we had this pandemic thing, and then y'all came back and y'all came back a little more Pentecostal than you left. You're all like "amen and hallelujah" and clap, clap, clap all the time, which is awesome. It's like the pandemic Costalized you, Presbytcostalized you. Servant leaders follow so hard after something others can't help but follow them. They go first and most, they sacrifice, they're humble, and they know the power of one. So who are you influencing or who are you trying to influence? And is this how you're doing it? And yes. We all make mistakes. I make tons of mistakes as a leader, tons of mistakes. But there's grace and

the Holy Spirit continues to empower us to do this. Who are you influencing? Is this how you're doing it?

This Mother's Day, a friend of mine named Eugene Cho, many of you know Eugene, he's preached here, he used to lead Quest Church, and now he leads a Christian nonprofit called Bread of Life that helps provide food for hungry people, and he is a stellar leader. He is actually one of my hero leaders. I think he's just one of the best leaders I've ever seen in my life and he's making a huge difference in our world. People literally are not dying because of the organization that Eugene leads. Well, this Mother's Day, he posted this picture of his mom on social media. And this is what he wrote in the caption. He says, "When I think of my mother, she's 'ordinary'. Nothing spectacular in the world's eyes, she hasn't started a company or a blog, no viral TikTok videos. She grew up with many challenges. She wasn't able to go to college. She immigrated from Korea in hopes of providing a better opportunity for her kids. She went through her personal pain. She worked at a grocery store than a small deli, and then a coffee shop.

"She did what she had to do and when I think about how she was able to find the strength to do what she needed to do, I think of this picture. A couple of years ago, I stopped by my parents' home without letting them know and my dad wasn't home and all I could hear was someone speaking very loudly upstairs. And as I walked up the stairs, I saw my mother, her head literally buried in the Holy Bible, on her knees, praying earnestly and passionately to God. Not a performance or a show just humbly coming before her Lord and savior. And I was so moved and humbled by her prayers for my father, for my wife and me, for our kids, for our ministry, for God's will to be done. This is my mom. She's an ordinary person who believes in an extraordinary God and I stand on her shoulders. Now go and do likewise. #NoteToSelf."

Eugene is an amazing leader who is changing the lives of thousands of people around the world for the better, but he stands on the shoulders of a Korean immigrant at prayer, who is herself an amazing leader. Leadership is just influence and she influenced her son to follow Jesus passionately and make a difference in the world. Because she follows after Jesus so hard, her son also follows after Jesus. She went first and most, she sacrificed for her and was humble, and the power of her one example is rippling across the world to the people Eugene's organization helps. That picture, that picture, that is what a leader looks like in the kingdom of God. Our culture says to be a leader you need to have the title. You need to have the office. You need to be the one to call the shots, make the play, throw the touchdown pass. Not so you and not so me.

Jesus calls and empowers and equips us to something much higher, much deeper, something much more powerful, something that lasts way longer, where down is up and humble servants change the world in Jesus' name. So let's say yes to him. Amen. Jesus, we know that you want to change the world through us, and, Lord, thank you for the vote of confidence you give us by calling all of us to be leaders, influencers, people who help other people move in good directions. Lord, equip and empower us to do that this week in our families, in our workplaces, where we live. Lord, help us to influence people to move in a positive direction, and most importantly, help us to influence people to call you their savior and their Lord, for you are good all the time. And we pray this in your name, Jesus. Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read Luke 22:24-26 and answer the below questions with your friends, family or All In small group.

Opening Questions:

- Looking back, were you able to apply any of the things we talked about last time to your life this week? What did you do? How did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions -- Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage and sermon?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions – Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following

- Leadership is another word for influence. Who are the people around you that you are influencing (aka leading)?
- How could you more purposefully influence (lead) them in positive directions?

Closing Question and Application:

- Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.