

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL

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Proper 24

“Jesus Teaches on Leadership, Power and Authority”

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Nobody asks for pain and suffering. Well, maybe that's not true. I understand the tattoo and piercing industry is still doing well. Paying someone to inflict pain on my body without a therapeutic reason is something I don't quite understand. Perhaps someone would be so kind as to explain it to me. I also don't understand paying voluntary taxes to the government on the rare chance that they might pay me big money, what people call “playing the lottery.” I don't understand that either.

Job hadn't understood everything that had happened to him. At the end of the book in chapter 38 where we read this morning, the tables were turned and God was asking him about the mysteries of life. Job found himself strangely without all his arguments and complaints.

We turn the pages of Scripture from the Old to the New Testament and find Jesus had suffered beyond what most of us can even imagine. The writer of Hebrews tells us that even he had to learn through suffering. He was the only one since Adam and Eve who was born sinless, yet he had to go through so much, and the Scripture says, because he had to go through so much, he can relate to you and me. He can empathize or sympathize with our weaknesses and shortcomings. He is not an armchair executive who has no time for us, nor real interest.

His plan and life involve complete interest in our lives and plans.

So he teaches us and everyone interested enough to listen about how to really get ahead in life. He gives us the secrets of true power and authority. And who would be a better teacher than God Himself?

But that's when the shocking news hits and we find the twist in the story developing. In Mark 10, we see James and John coming to Jesus, and kind of like your young child asking you for whatever they want, before they tell you what it is, they ask Jesus to give them what they ask.

Like any wise parent, he first asks them what they want, and then the implicit “we'll see” is communicated. We find out that the sons of thunder

want the best seats in the house in heaven. And it is more than the ultimate ticket scam for the best seats, it is an asking for the highest office in God's business, being first and second officer on the ship. So Jesus first of all warns them that these offices, these positions come with significant cost. He asks them if they can pay that cost. They say they can, even though they probably are not thinking about being torture to death, for instance. He says they will go through what he is about to go through, and later in history we learn that the disciples are crucified for their faith. But more than this, Jesus tries to tell them that the high road in these matters is not what you expect.

Jesus' highest way to leadership, authority and power is by caring for, loving and serving those around him. He shows them this in the upper room before his death by washing their feet. In our culture, he might come to our houses and instead of being entertained as you might a clergy person, he would rather insist on cleaning your toilets or doing your laundry, or mopping your floors.

His way to the top, is not what we might expect. He cares about people first and foremost. He cares about what they are going through. He challenges people who have it all together, and helps those who are falling apart. He knows the difference between simply giving everyone the same thing and giving everyone what they need. He meets us where we are.

The Religious Social Action Coalition here challenges us and our politicians to eradicate poverty or at least reduce it. Caring for the poor is one thing on God's heart, and certainly one thing on which most religions can agree.

God also meets us in our need in relationships. Where we have been hurt, where we are hurt, where we still feel the sting of broken, hurting others, there God meets us.

And yet through all this, God never forces us to serve. He allows us to make a choice. That choice to care for others, rather than just for ourselves, comes out of a position of strength. As God ministers to us in Jesus, then we can minister to others. As we receive love, so we can give love. As we receive grace, so we can give grace. As we receive a patient and kind word, so we can give a patient and kind word.

Beware of those who say to you, "You must be a good Christian. Then you should serve me and do what I say, now." Beware of those who want to take

advantage of you. For the truth is: we are servants and even slaves, but not of one another, we are servants of God. Therefore I can say and so should each of you, "I am your servant, but you are not my master." Strange dynamics go on in some families, some churches, some organizations, where one person does little or nothing to help a situation or relationship, while another person seems to be required to do it all. We need to learn what our responsibilities are, what we can do, what we cannot do, what things are good for our health and others' health, and what is not.

We need to learn what we can do as a church and do well, and what we cannot or should not do. We need to have a focus, because we can't do everything. I can't. We can't. But we can do a few things well rather than a lot of things not so well.

We can also begin to take more responsibility for making sure we do our part here. You've probably heard of the parable of the football stadium for the Church. This is the story where there's twenty people on the field desperately needing rest and a huge crowd around them who desperately need exercise. We have strong leaders here and a wealth of gifts and abilities.

We simply need to apply what we already have in new and creative ways. We hope to addressing these needs and finding out those new and creative ways through sending four leaders to the Stewards by Design seminar, which is happening next May. We also hope to be better able to clearly ask you to take part in projects, outreach, education and new larger ventures here. We haven't figured it all out yet.

We do know it is time. We also hope to be celebrating our 235th Anniversary as a congregation this next year with many different venues and ideas. Perhaps you would like to add your own ideas to the leaders'. This would be wonderful, and the way to do that is simply to contact me, or the Church office or one of the elders.

We continue to be thankful for many blessings here. We want to tell you that the Invite a Friend Sunday will be December 6, where the TSO, the choir and others will lead us in a special celebration of Christmas in music. There will be more information coming.

We will be continuing to upgrade and renovate the building, not just the furniture, and we are already thankful for the upgrades that Andy and the Board has been implementing in regard to the heating system and insulation concerns. Just like any home that is around fifty years old, we will be looking at renovation and new projects.

So please pray for your leaders here, and think about how you might be able to help. And as you look around this cite, you will notice a number of projects that need to happen. Rather than being overwhelmed with the number of projects we have to do (both inside and outside the church building), we would like to have some fun doing them, and not have them simply as overwhelming tasks.

We trust the Lord in this continuing time of Thanksgiving for the harvest workers with the joy of the Lord in their hearts, because God is good and God's love does endure forever.

Let us pray.