

Sermon: Sunday 21 October 2018 – 22nd Sunday after Pentecost
St. John the Evangelist Toorak
Job 38:1-7; Psalm 104:1-10, 26; Hebrews 5:1-10; Mark 10:35-45

With by-elections, changes of leadership and a state election a little over a month away, politics and leadership has been somewhat in the news lately.

Our precious democracy, not the status quo around the world it should be noted, has been dissected and analysed and we find ourselves in a society that is increasingly disillusioned with politics and politicians.

Collectively, we are sceptical and distrustful of institutions of government that should be there to serve the people and community, but appear more concerned with the election process than governing and offering a shared vision that embraces all members of the community.

At the recent Archbishop's conversation held in Federation Square, the topic was "The state of the State: Victoria goes to the polls" our Archbishop and Primate Philip Freier was joined by former politician Patrick McNamara and social activist Bevan Warner.

The discussion moved quite quickly to broader considerations of what the role of government and politicians should be, and concerns for the marginalised and disadvantaged who often fall out of sight and mind. In the midst of all this political stuff, today's Gospel brings us 'servant leadership'.

"For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve."

The idea that God the eternal creator, not only became human like us to be in deeper relationship, but came to serve our needs, is rather mind blowing.

It did not fit with the traditional models of leaders known to the people of Jesus' day, and it is a model of leadership that is countercultural in our own context.

Although current buzz words in corporate leadership and HR now include 'empowering leadership' and 'inspiring leadership', there is still something in Jesus' way of doing things that can teach us something today.

Jesus was a teacher and leader with an earthly ministry.

To minister means to serve.

We adopted that language in our own Western political structures. Prime Minister equals first servant.

Those we elect to leadership are there to serve our needs, not solely as individuals, but as communities of human beings. In our Christian worldview, all people are made in God's image and all are of equal value to God, whether they acknowledge it or not.

We should hope that our leaders will model Christ and serve our genuine needs, not our whims and wishes, nor our basest motives.

We yearn for meaningful leadership in many aspects of our lives.

In schools, we expect principals and heads of schools to nurture and enable a culture of education where students are empowered to learn and teachers are empowered to teach and where all are safe.

In business, we expect Boards of Directors to act responsibly, ethically and morally, and we are disappointed when companies and businesses fail to protect staff and treat customers or clients with disrespect.

What might the world be like if all people in positions of authority, leadership, power and influence put service to others before considerations of their own status?

I think, this is where we get our great philanthropists and benefactors. These ideas of service are where we get inspiring leaders who truly take people with them in working for the good of many, not just those who agree with them.

Servant leadership is not about being swayed by trends and self-interest.

Servant leadership is about putting service before considerations of greatness.

Jesus is the cornerstone of our Christian faith.

He did not lead by coercion, force or fear.

Jesus led by examples of inclusion, care and compassion.

In reading the Gospels we are called to pay attention to what Jesus Christ, God with us in human flesh, taught us about living in community.

Jesus regularly challenged the structures of society he lived in, particularly when those structures meant that people were excluded and marginalised.

Jesus went to the uneducated and the teachers alike. He talked to women and welcomed children as well as spending time with men. He talked to Jews and Gentiles, Romans and Samaritans, the sick, the blind, the lame, the marginalised.

Jesus engaged with leaders and officials, servants and slaves, and he brought them all the same message – the reign of God is near; love God and love your neighbour as yourself.

Jesus gave of himself in ministry to others, not in submission, but in service to them and in service to us.
And then he asked us to do likewise.

Being a servant of Christ means putting our faith and what our faith teaches us at the core of all that we do – to act in a way that honours and glorifies God, not only ourselves.

In the Letter to the Hebrews, Jesus is also described as a new model for High Priest who will act on behalf of the people before God.

Jesus himself became the sacrificial offering, the only offering necessary to save us.

Serving our needs and serving God, Jesus calls us to greatness in faith, not greatness as the world might see it.

Servant leadership doesn't mean you become a doormat. It invites us to reconsider and refocus our goals in leading others and our expectations of those who lead us.

So a request.

In response to the lessons of today's Gospel, I ask you to strive to model Christ in your leadership of others, as I will strive to do for my part in leading this community of faith.

Where you have a part to play in selecting others for positions of leadership and government, consider the model of Christ who demonstrated inclusion, compassion and care.

In all that we do in our daily lives, let us put our faith at our core and let our actions show God's love to the world, so that God may be glorified through our words and deeds, and all people come to know God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit in their lives.

The Lord be with you.

Elizabeth Murray