

## **“Follow the Leader?”**

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Sunday, November 18, 2018 (Stewardship Sunday)

Hebrews 10:11-14; Mark 13:1-8

I don't like this passage. It's a lot of bad news and I'm sick and tired of bad news. The fires in California are more than devastating. Mass shootings. We have wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes and famines. The crisis in Yemen. Environmental damage. Hatred, bigotry, and on and on. If these are the birth pangs, I've had enough. Go for the caesarean section, please. Just end the awfulness of this world and get on with the new.

That's my cheery beginning this morning. Happy Thanksgiving to you!

In our passage today, Jesus is telling his disciples more things they can't quite understand. One of the disciples is awed by the temple. The temple built by Herod the Great, was a mountain of white marble covered in gold. Large courtyards, colonnaded courts, grand porticoes and balconies, covered walkways, and massive staircases. In total it was 400 by 500 yards. It took up 1/6 of the city of Jerusalem. It was built to accommodate all those who came for the festivals and to impress other leaders. But Jesus says it will be completely destroyed. Not one stone will remain standing. It is a place of worship where true worship doesn't always take place because the leaders of the temple are also barren of true worship. Some are corrupt.

We can talk about leadership in terms of political leaders or business leaders or technological leaders. There are good people in all those areas. There are also some not-so-good people. Who do you follow? Why?

I have a dear friend who left her job this week in order to save the job of someone else. The leader of their organization decided it was easier to fire staff than to do the job of fundraising. Bad leaders don't just destroy their own lives and organizations, they take down other lives and that effects other lives and on and on.

As Christians how do know who to follow if we want a vibrant faith and a life lived with hope, security, and a sense of being truly loved?

Who do you follow in your spiritual life and why? There are so many people out with Christian self-help books, or strong movements through social media.

I'm not talking about the cult figures like Jim Jones of the People's Temple or David Koresh and the Branch Davidians or Marshall Applewhite who led Heaven's Gate or Warren Jeffs of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints. Cults will always be, and the most vulnerable and lost will be drawn to them. Jimmy Swaggart Ministries is one today preying on the fearful or the empty souls of people looking for purpose or hope. A demand for followers to sell their possessions and give the money to the Swaggart ministry actually happens. The proverbial wolf in sheep's clothing. But the pressure of recruiters for these schemes is intense! Fear is a great motivator. These corrupters of the faith destroy lives and souls.

Beyond appearances: Jesus says don't be fooled by those who claim to be him or sent by him. Jesus will die. The temple will fall. But the disciples must be ready with heads and hearts full of all that truth Jesus filled them with for three years.

Beyond appearances: There are those in church leadership positions who are charismatic, charming, larger than life. Maybe they are as good as they appear. Maybe not. Jesus knew that some of the church leaders took advantage of their positions and over-used their power.

Leaders are important. But I wonder if we look to the wrong places for leadership? Jesus prepared a rag-tag bunch of disciples to go and prepare the world for the best good news. Jesus didn't elevate one of them to be emperor first, he said you know what to do. Go do it.

Good leaders set visions for what is good and what moves a group of people forward. A good leader makes connections with his or her followers. A good leader listens because maybe someone has a better idea. A good leader has contingency plans for when things don't go quite as expected. Good leaders respect other's opinions. Good leaders have empathy. A good leader will learn from criticism. Good leaders admit when they are wrong and apologize. Good leaders don't make excuses.

As Christians we strive to live good, honest, other-focused lives. We strive to love the unlovable, protect the downtrodden, speak for those with no voice, fight for those who are persecuted.

Which means we are a whole group of leaders right here today. We are followed. We all have others who look to us to be kind and compassionate. We have others who look to us for ideas and maybe even answers. We are watched when we are unaware that eyes are on us. We are judged when we deserve to be and sometimes when we don't deserve to be.

But we are the real deal. We are not the fakes or those who are looking for that sucker who is apparently born every minute. We do not harm, but we build up and we love up and we give more. We put out the fires that rage and collect those drowning in flood waters. We rebuild the crumbling places. We shine the light on the goodness of others, and do not claim the spotlight for ourselves.

We don't claim to be Jesus, just to know and be known by him.

Life is still a mess. But we are reminded today by Jesus Christ that amidst the rubble of the temple and the craziness of corrupt and vile leaders running amuck, our work as leaders continues to spread the gospel, hand out the blankets, rebuild what has been burned down and love our neighbors with empathy and compassion, every single one of them. We follow our servant-leader in every way. For we are bringing heaven to earth with each act of our servant leadership. Amen.