

Sermon for 25 October 2020 ! Bethesda UMC/Baltimore
Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost/Reformation Sunday
Scriptures: Deuteronomy 34:1-12 ; Psalm 90:1-6, 13-17 ; 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8 ; Matthew
22:34-46
« *Leadership development* »

We've recently been reviewing our church government, as we prepare for Church Conference next month. We're Methodical, after all ... and we have a pretty reasonable, practical pattern for getting work done.

One of our standing committees is Nominations, and the pastor is its chairman. I suppose this is to give me the chance to select people I feel are suited for particular assignments. Sort of stacking the decks my way as leader. The committee members, for their part, are there to affirm or challenge my suggestions ... and the idea is that we'll work it out constructively, together, which leads me to my sermon title: "Leadership development."

I got it from the first lesson, which tells about Moses finishing his job and dying ... and about Joshua's being well-prepared to follow Moses.

Right off, we're facing the fact that leaders come and go. Moses was unforgettable ... but after God worked wonders through Moses, it was time for Joshua.

Since we're in a Presidential election right now, it seems to me to fit that we talk about transfer of power. So let's take a few moments to pray about that. "God, teach us how to honor the law, respect our neighbors, stand up bravely for our considered views ... and then grant peace in this anxious moment, all across this great land. Amen."

The rest of the lessons go on to other things, but each one can be related to the same subject of preparing new people to take charge of some responsible part of our group life, in church, and in the world generally. Psalm 90 reminds us the whole thing works because God is so capable.

"Lord, thou has been our dwelling place in all generations." We are here to demonstrate that. That is the point of everything. Please help us do that. "Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us...O prosper the work of our hands." Period.

1 Thessalonians is probably the oldest book in the New Testament, written by Paul, we're pretty sure. He sounds like somebody training leaders ... he's got this little church started, and now he's keeping up with them, encouraging, reminding, explaining, using himself as an example. Training leaders. Maybe they think they're followers ... but he's making it clear they are in charge, every one, of some part of life together. They are a group, and a group shares responsibility.

By now you see where I'm heading. This Sunday is sign-up Sunday. No more checking in for an hour and, "I love you. I'll see you next week." Read between the lines: "I've started

something. You've become very dear to me. The point is, I'm not there now, so love one another and do good work for the neighborhood together, each according to your particular gifts, and agreed-to in regular discussion by the whole group, because Jesus is coming back soon to end time and we all want to be ready, with as much done as we can get done before he returns."

That's how the early church thought and taught. That's the only way they got going, believe that. Wars all around, the Romans bearing down on them, one branch of Jews arguing with another ... but "something about that name," as the song goes.... Or as Jesus says some place, people will be drawn to you because of how you treat one another "See these Christians, how they love one another," as John puts it...

Fast forward 2,000 years, and I can't go any farther.

That's all we've got. We're not just checking in. We're demonstrating. "Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses...He was unequalled for all the signs and wonders that the Lord sent him to perform." How did I get off the subject? It's you and me we're talking about. It's God using us to work wonders. I'm not kidding. This is not about old times. This is now. This is all we've got. This is start-over time. It's start-up time. It's love time. Love your neighbor as yourself. You and I are starting a movement. I'm not making this up. This isn't your mother's church. This is us, now, doing what's right ... not what we're used to, but what needs doing ...

And as the Gospel puts it, "No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did any one dare to ask any more questions."

You teach me how to preach. You show me what needs doing. You love me ... don't wait for me to show you how.

Leadership development.

Through Jesus Christ,

Amen.

....