

*A Baptismal Meditation delivered by The Rev. Timothy C. Ahrens, Sr. Minister, The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, Pentecost 6, July 8, 2012, dedicated to Lorelai Katherine Phillips on her baptismal day, to Nancy and Lee Burba as they celebrate 25 years of marriage, to Marti Rideout as she begins her ministry among us and always to the glory of God!*

## **“Kings, Prophets and Followers”**

### ***II Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10; Mark 6:1-13***

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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.

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In today’s texts we have several models for leadership. David is extolled as a Shepherd King while Jesus is presented as a Prophetic Leader. How do we gain strength and direction for leadership *and followership* from our scriptures?

The Shepherd is one who guards, feeds, nurtures and protects the flock. In II Samuel 5, David is named and claimed by God and set apart for leadership to care for God’s people as a Shepherd King. Moreover, David is set apart as a “Good Shepherd,” that is the Shepherd who exists for the sake of the sheep and their well-being and as such is willing to lay down his life for them. A bad shepherd is one who acts as though the sheep exist for the well-being, enhancement and profit of the shepherd. David will demonstrate “bad shepherd” qualities later as he abuses his leadership causing the death of Uriah is faithful general after

stealing Uriah's wife Bathsheba because of his lust for her, but as II Samuel 5 opens, this Shepherd King is good. The qualities we are shown in this first glance of King David are qualities to be embraced and followed in serving others.

Jesus, whom the Gospel of John names and claims to be the ultimate "Good Shepherd" has a much rougher time offering his prophetic leadership in Mark 6. He comes to his hometown of Nazareth and the local folks of his childhood synagogue are astounded and **offended** by him. They are astounded that the carpenter, the son of Mary, the sibling of James, Joses, Judas and Simon and the un-named sisters has much at all going on.

Beyond his background, his training and his familial pedigree, these local yokels are **OFFENDED** by him. A better translation is this – they are "scandalized" by him. He was "*too much for them*" (NEB). You might say, they simply "rejected him."

You know what they are talking about... It is that response people make when they can't believe something good can come out of your family or mine.

And here come the put-downs. They say, "*You've got to be kidding. Something good came from Mary's illegitimate birth as a teenage girl? Where did this boy get his smarts? How did he become such a "wise man" having grown up as a "wise guy?" And where did he get these healing hands?*" You see, in their minds, Jesus comes from the wrong side of the sheep path, if you know what I mean. They have always thought this carpenter was "one nail short"...if you know what I am talking about...

Jesus is no Hometown Hero in Nazareth.

Jesus has a great response because he knows who he is and to whom he answers and belongs. Grounding himself in the prophetic tradition, he names himself as a Prophet of God. And as such, he declares prophets are not without honor – EXCEPT – in the following places – "in their hometowns, among their own kin, and in their own house." Wow! He was amazed at the unbelief of folks in his hometown. As a result of this unbelief, he cannot do

any deeds of power there (except...Mark tells us...he did lay his hands on a few sick people and cured them. They must not have “known him” or judged him as Mary’s son).

I like what the Gospel of Thomas says on this topic – *“No prophet is acceptable in his village; no physician works cures on those who know him.”*

In other words, Prophecy and Healing have a hard time taking root at home. How true! In this regard of think of [Norman Maclean](#)’s [A River Runs Through It](#). As he speaks of his own lack of ability to help his alcoholic/ gambling brother and his own family, Norman writes, *“So it is that we can seldom help anybody really close to us. Either we don't know what part to give or maybe we don't like to give any part of ourselves. Then, more often than not, the part that is needed is not wanted.... And even more often, we do not have the part that is needed.”* He concludes, *“It is those we live with and love and should know who elude us.”*

As Jesus leaves the judgmental, unhealed elusive ones in the tight little community of his childhood, he heads out to other villages. In surrounding towns and villages, folks are receptive to Jesus. He heals. He teaches. He even gathers twelve disciples. As a prophetic leader, he has learned some valuable lessons. As he gathers his disciples, Jesus them to leave all their baggage back home (literally and figuratively). Travel light. Carry no bread, no bags, no money, simply the clothes on their backs. Enter homes, be with people there. If they accept you, stay. If they reject you, move on – after shaking the dust off your sandals.

Jesus is a servant leader and he developed followers who were walked beside him and learned from his gifts of servant leadership. He has ten qualities of servant leadership which I have developed in reflecting on Jesus. I simply list them here (but time does not allow for deeper digging).

1. He is Compassionate. He is always attentive to people and their needs.

2. He is committed to Ministry over Structures. He doesn't care about the trappings of organization but seeks to provide delivery systems for ministry.
3. He is giving and inspires good giving and a life of stewardship in his followers.
4. He is great at listening to God and people and discerning God's will for his life.
5. He is honest, straight-forward and simple in assessing people and situations.
6. He is unhindered by cultural trappings and temptations.
7. He embodies prophetic imagination. He wants his followers to question and speak out; to never stop seeking, growing and expanding their worldviews and faith views.
8. He is a man of prayer - able to withdraw to gain new strength and insight.
9. He is persuasive – sometimes to the crowds and most importantly, one person at a time.
10. He is Holy Bold. To be bold is beautiful. To HOLY Bold is divine. A holy bold person shakes the dust off and moves on. But, they do not cower or hide from the truth of God which is within them.

In his book Servant Leadership: a Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness, Robert Greenleaf writes of David and Jesus and other great leaders: “*A Great Leader is seen as a servant first, and that simple fact is the key to his greatness.*”

As we seek to follow our Savior, let us know that we are following the master of servant leadership. And in so doing, we are called to be servants, too. Amen.