



I am a follower of Jesus in the Methodist tradition  
because of the balance between head and heart.

**Servant Leadership:**  
**Bringing Meaning  
Out of Chaos**

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
September 16, 2012 Rev. Larry Moffet

We know “to follow” means to be a Servant Leader. Jesus shows the way. Remember how his disciples argued about who was the greatest? He said, “Those who want to be greatest must be servant of all” Remember how often he stopped what he was saying to meet someone at the point of their need? Remember how on the night before his death he washed his disciples and friends’ feet? He was saying, “we have been walking dusty roads together. Let me show my love for you in this way” Servant Leadership.

If we, like him, are to be Servant Leaders, then we have the right to ask:

When do we serve and when do we lead? That’s the focus for tonight: “how?”

This morning please explore with me the “why” of Servant Leadership.

Let’s start with what we know. The world around us is full of chaos.

It’s easy to allow all the jangly messages that come at us overwhelm us. Bits and pieces of reality swirl around us. They cram our heads and hearts. Work pressures increase. Because more is possible, more is expected. Studies show productivity is rising faster than compensation. Time evaporates. In our personal lives, we choose what we will do from increasing options, more possible activities. We expect more from others and ourselves.

That’s a snapshot of the world we live in. It is chaos.

Part of chaos is good. It is good to live in a world where we can see more, learn more, and be a part of more things that truly matter.

**I believe the job of a Servant Leader is to work with others to bring meaning out of chaos.**

Over and over that is what Jesus did, and daily we are called to follow his lead, to aim our energies at what we can do that we need to do that will make a difference. Today’s Gospel does just that, step by step.:

**<sup>27</sup>Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?”**

They’ve been living in chaos. People in Galilee and in foreign territory have come at them day and night, needing food, healing, and meaning.

After his friends answer with what the people are saying, he asks **<sup>29</sup> “...who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.”**

Peter’s answer is breathtaking in clarity and simplicity. Perhaps Jesus said not to tell anyone because expectations and danger would escalate. He wants to focus on the way Messiah will be Servant Leader:

**<sup>31</sup> ...must undergo great suffering, and be rejected ... and be killed...and rise again.**

Jesus and his friends are standing in a brand new Roman city dedicated to a very different kind of leadership: power, domination, forcing things to happen. So Peter, reacts to Jesus' vulnerability, and says in effect, "You have all power, you can make this world a better place right now." Jesus responds bluntly: God's way is different.

**<sup>33</sup>...you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."**

Jesus outlines the way servant leadership works, with an invitation:

**<sup>34</sup>He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup>For those who [cling to their life the way it is] will lose it, and those who [give their life to others] for my sake...[that's the true Good News] will save it.**

Jesus' friends and we aren't the only people to live in chaos. At Pentecost people couldn't even talk the same language. That's a metaphor for our day! When the Rome destroyed Jerusalem, the world of every follower of Jesus was in chaos. Yet out of that tragedy came a new possibility: friends of this Servant Leader spread out across the globe. I can't imagine the chaos people faced in as they crossed the Frontier, or what our ancestors faced as immigrants from other lands. Creation itself was chaos, Genesis says, before the Creator got busy. In every one of these examples, New Life came from chaos.

The multiple ways of communicating in our day are chaos. They also carry in them potential for meaning and connection we are hungry for.

The possibilities around us are rich, and create their own chaos:

**In every age, in every circumstance God has called Servant Leaders to work together to bring meaning from chaos.**

We can be Servant Leaders in big ways or in little ways. It all works together in God's new creation: We are collaborators with each other, and with God in bringing meaning out of all these chaotic possibilities and destructive possibilities we live in the midst of.

This past week I saw lots of meaning coming from chaos because Servant Leaders stepped up and started working until good things happened.

In Antelope Valley, on the east side of downtown, thousands gathered in a new park on a beautiful night to celebrate 35 or 40 years of hard work it took to create a not just a park, but also flood control, and safer traffic flow.

I am told it is an understatement to say chaos was the status quo when ideas converged to combine flood control with traffic flow and create parks.

Yesterday 25 of us worked to clean and organize parts of God's House, this building. First, I want you to know it was fun. It was hard work, too. Seeing Jenna and young John carrying stuff to the dumpster, my heart soared. **Servant Leaders bring meaning out of chaos.**

Note: we bring don't always bring order out of chaos, we bring meaning.

Now a word about picking up your cross. What is it? It might be any burden you carry. It might be doubts, it might be a physical condition.

It might be fear that you won't do the right thing. It might be anything.

Jesus said that picking up and taking with us whatever it seems to hinder us will actually help us follow him. He took his cross.

We can follow.

This is how we join heart and head: our head says “take charge” (like Peter).

Christ says “follow.” We use both heads and hearts. They work together.

Others have shared the same idea – that Servant Leaders collaborate to bring meaning out of chaos. Said Eleanor Roosevelt: *You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You must do the thing you think you cannot do.*”

“In a gentle way you can shake the world, “ said Ghandi. Jesus said:

<sup>34</sup> [to] the crowd [and disciples,...“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup>For those who [cling to their life the way it is] will lose it, and those who [give their life to others] for my sake...[that’s the true Good News] will save it.

That’s enough “why.” It’s time now for “how.” How will you be a Servant Leader this week? How will you collaborate with others to bring meaning out of all the possibilities in the chaos around us?

Tonight at sundown starts a brand new year for our Jewish brothers and sisters.

Let me share an old rabbi’s story, designed to show us our role in creation. All through creation, angels ask God questions: “That sun is powerful. Are you done yet?” No, not yet. “Those mountains, they are gorgeous. Are you done yet?” No, not yet.

“That zebra is pretty funny. Are you done yet?” No, not yet. “Those human beings are pretty complex. Are you done yet?” No, not yet. “

When will you be done?” God says: “I don’t know. Ask my partners” pointing to us.

**EPISTLE SCRIPTURE JAMES 3:2-13** Those who never say anything wrong are truly close to perfection, because they can then control every part of themselves.

<sup>3</sup>Once we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we control the rest of their bodies.

<sup>4</sup>The same with ships—no matter how large they are, and even if they are driven by fierce winds, they are directed by a very small rudder to wherever the captain wants to go.

<sup>5</sup>The tongue is like that. It’s a small part of the body, yet it makes great boasts.

See how tiny the spark is that sets a huge forest ablaze!

<sup>6</sup>The tongue is such a flame. Among all the parts of the body, the tongue is such a flame.

Among all the parts of the body, the tongue is a whole wicked world in itself. It infects the entire body.

Its flames encircle our course from birth, and its fire is kindled by hell.

<sup>7</sup>All kinds of animals—birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea—can be tamed by us,

<sup>8</sup>but no one can tame the tongue. It’s a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

<sup>9</sup>We use it to say, “Praised be our God and Creator”; then we use it to curse each other—we who are created in the image of God.

<sup>10</sup>Blessing and curse come out of the same mouth. This shouldn’t be, my sisters and brothers!

<sup>11</sup>Does a spring emit both pure water and brackish water?

<sup>12</sup>My sisters and brothers, can a fig tree produce olives, or can a grapevine produce figs?

No—and neither can a fountain produce both salt water and fresh water.

<sup>13</sup>If there are any wise and learned among you, let them show it by good living—with humility, and with wisdom in their actions.

**\*GOSPEL MARK 7:27-37**

*New Testament, pages 43 – 44*

<sup>27</sup>Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?”

<sup>28</sup>And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” <sup>29</sup>He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?”

Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.”

<sup>30</sup>And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

<sup>31</sup>Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed,

and after three days rise again. <sup>32</sup>He said all this quite openly.

Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. <sup>33</sup>But turning and looking at his disciples,

he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

<sup>34</sup>He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “

If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

<sup>35</sup>For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.

<sup>36</sup>For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?

<sup>37</sup>Indeed, what can they give in return for their life?

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