

The Courage to Lead
Dr. Raphael G. Warnock
Palm Sunday, April 2, 2023

Scripture References:

John 13:1-15: (NRSV)

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ²The devil had already decided^[a] that Judas son of Simon Iscariot would betray Jesus. And during supper ³Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴got up from supper, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. ⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" ⁷Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." ⁸Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." ⁹Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" ¹⁰Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet,^[b] but is entirely clean. And you^[c] are clean, though not all of you." ¹¹For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean." ¹²After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had reclined again, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you?" ¹³You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.

Sermon Summary:

Today, as we celebrated Palm Sunday at Ebenezer Baptist Church, Pastor Raphael Warnock opened his message with a great proclamation: "We are suffering so much these days from a vacuum of viable and courageous leadership - we need leaders." Not people who just want to be seen, but people who are willing to serve. We need leaders. Not people who just want to be out front, but leaders. We don't need ego-driven narcissistic personalities, in love with themselves, but people with a heart for the people. Having a huge social media following does not make you a leader; we need real leaders in our state, in our nation and in our world, God gives us leaders. Anytime, 9-year-old children, and the adults that show up for our children in a Nashville school can be blown away and the nation presses on as if this is normal – we move on as if this routine carnage of children is necessary; that this is the price we must pay for some distorted understanding of certain freedoms – we need leaders. But what about the freedom to live; the freedom to be able to drop your children off and trust that you will be able to pick them up at 3:00pm. Pastor Warnock reminded us that there have been 129 mass shootings in our nation to date in 2023. Anytime this can happen again and again and we have politicians who are bowing down and so concerned about their positions and their power that they are sacrificing our children on the altars of the NRA – God knows we need leaders!

We need leaders who understand that leadership is not about an office it is about an orientation. Leadership is not about a position but a disposition. We need courageous and compassionate leaders. We need ethical and moral leadership. Dr. King said that we need

leaders not in love with money but in love with justice; not in love with publicity but in love with humanity. And nobody demonstrates this love better than Jesus.

Jesus, is our great leader, our liberator, our Lord. By the time we catch up with Jesus in the 13th chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus has already made his triumphant Palm Sunday entrance into the city of Jerusalem and there is this sense in the city that a new and different kind of leader is on the scene. We are now into Holy Week and there is a lot of swirling around the city, both political and religious, around Jesus. Jesus posed a threat to the empire and they were afraid of his influence, but Jesus remained clear. Like Jesus, leaders must remain clear: The process of what you need to do is better when you are clear. You can get to where you need to go when you are clear.

Sermons Points:

Leaders must do the following:

1. ***Leaders must be clear about their MOTIVES:*** What is driving that desire to lead. Have you asked yourself, why do you want to lead or why do you think you should or could lead? Churches are filled with people who want to be in charge. There are people in churches that want to be in charge from the pulpit to the pew and the question they need to ask themselves is why? Leaders must be clear about their motives; everything that Jesus did was motivated by love and nothing else. It is in the text: “Jesus knew that His hour had come for Him to depart from the world and go the Father and having loved His own, who in the world, He loved them.” (John 13:) Jesus did what He did because He loved people You cannot lead the people of God if you do not love them. It takes courage to lead, because it takes courage to love and you cannot lead without love.
2. ***Leaders must be clear about their METHODS:*** The methods of leaders flow from their motives. In the text, Jesus takes the Roman Empire’s view of power and authority and turns it on its head. John 13:4-5, Jesus took off His robe and puts on a towel – Jesus, a King, rides into Jerusalem on a mule instead of a horse. Jesus washes the feet of His disciples in the middle of the meal – you don’t wash feet in the middle of the meal, you wash them when the guest arrives to wash the dust from their feet from their travel. If Jesus’ motive is love, then this shows that His methodology is humility. Secure leaders exhibit humility because they already know who they are. Jesus was secure in who He was because He already knew that the Father had given all things into His hand and that He came from the Father and was returning back to the Father. Jesus was a secure leader free to serve. In contrast, insecure leaders exude arrogance because deep down, they know they are not who they claim to be. They have to constantly remind everybody who they are because deep down they are afraid people are going to find out who they really are. Insecure leaders are always watching their backs.
3. ***Leaders must be clear about their MISSION:*** Robes are about symbolism and towels are about serving. Serving is the mission of leaders.
4. ***Leaders must be clear about their MODEL:*** As a leader, you must remain clear about your model. Jesus, bowed down to the ground in order to wash feet. The fact that Jesus, Lord, bowed down to wash the feet of the disciples offended Peter so much that

he protested. But Peter did not understand that Jesus was demonstrating a different model of leadership. Jesus was demonstrating a leadership model of love and humility.

Discussion Questions:

- 1.** When has Jesus made a triumphant entry into your life? Or did he enter so humbly that only after a time did you realize his presence? Which is the usual way he has come to you?
- 2.** Where have you sought leadership? Why? Where have you avoided leadership? What holds you back?
- 3.** Why does it take courage to lead? What does love have to do with leadership?
- 4.** How do you make sure that you are clear about your motives, methods, mission and model when in a position of leadership?