

07.21.24 ~ Pentecost 9
“Leadership Dedication”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

1 Timothy 3:1-7 (The Message)

¹⁻⁷ If anyone wants to provide leadership in the church, good! But there are preconditions: A leader must be well-thought-of, committed to his wife, cool and collected, accessible, and hospitable. He must know what he’s talking about, not be overfond of wine, not pushy but gentle, not thin-skinned, not money-hungry. He must handle his own affairs well, attentive to his own children and having their respect. For if someone is unable to handle his own affairs, how can he take care of God’s church? He must not be a new believer, lest the position go to his head and the Devil trip him up. Outsiders must think well of him, or else the Devil will figure out a way to lure him into his trap.

Leader: These Are Paul’s Words about Leadership.

All: Thanks be to God!

Hebrews 12:1-3, 7-13; 13:7-8 (NIV)

12 ¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart . . . ⁷ Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? ⁸ If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. ⁹ Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! ¹⁰ They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. ¹¹ No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. ¹² Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. ¹³ “Make level paths for your feet,” so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed . . .

13 ⁷ Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. ⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Leader: These Are Important Reminders for Us All!

All: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Dear God, our creator and sovereign leader, we thank you for this morning’s study and worship. We also thank you, Lord, for calling our church leaders and ministers of the past, present, and future. Please help us to perceive beauty in the individuals who serve the Kingdom as earthly leaders and draw out the skills and inspiration it

takes to lead others to you. We especially thank you for our Church Leadership Council Executive Board, our volunteers, committees, teachers, greeters, church staff, and contractors. Strengthen our resolve to do your will, Lord, and to be courageous where innovation is needed. Finally, open these Scriptures to empower and motivate us to be the dedicated leaders in the community you have called the church to be. May my reflections be your words. Amen.

It has been a week! Thank you for your prayers, Church, for several things going on in the life of our Mission Center development, our congregation, and for me personally as I “manned the fort!” so to speak. It felt almost pre-pandemic having a volunteer in to help with bulletins and other office business. Thank you! And although I truly miss our Administrative Assistant who’s on vacation, I was never lonely because there is always so much going on to further God’s Kingdom here during the week. Food Mission deliveries, Sandwich Team (did you know we have 8 or 9 people each week?), people setting up for the NBMBC Woman’s Day luncheon, voice instruction, a meeting and tour with a new Japanese 20-person choir, called Kohaku Ensemble, who will be rehearsing here on first and third Saturdays, **and** our monthly FACETS diaper truck delivery! Our building is **not** sitting idle during the week like so many churches are; please help me change the narrative! We have been for decades and still are a vibrant church in this community, thanks to your leadership and participation.

I remind us of these facts every now and then to encourage us as a congregation; it is why I called my sermon today “*Leadership Dedication*,” as opposed to a motivational talk like *Leadership Success*. As I studied these two Scriptures, they reminded me that I serve a congregation of modest, humble leaders who are truly committed to this

church family and dedicated to serving the Kingdom of God. As you know, there are several definitions of the word “dedication.” According to Merriam-Webster, your leadership dedication is a combination of all these definitions: “an act or rite of dedicating to a divine being or to a sacred use;” “a devoting or setting aside for a particular purpose;” “self-sacrificing devotion and loyalty;” a tribute to a person (as in a book or music dedication); or a ceremony marking a significant event (like a community park or baby dedication). The word, “commitment,” in our context here is more specific: “an agreement or pledge to do something in the future.” I believe your dedication and commitment **are** our legacy; that wisdom must be passed on to the next generations. One day you will be considered the great “cloud of witnesses” that we look to today in our past church history. As we look to our future and the continued growth of our church, please be prayerful for the Nominating Committee as they pray and contemplate our structure and strive to fill positions of both support and leadership within the church.

Passing that torch is what the apostle Paul explains to his mentee, Timothy, and what the unknown author of Hebrews is talking about in both readings. What does it take to be a leader committed to a cause or belief like Jesus? What must it take to be a leader dedicated to a group of believers who are being persecuted? Like Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, some days we may feel like it is too hard to “fight” for our beliefs in truth, honesty, justice, mercy, love, compassion, and the right to serve others in his name. And as we discussed in last week’s sermon, in the current political climate, the divisive and competitive discourse still outweighs the citizen’s demand for unity and peace. YET you are

excellent examples of “*Leadership Dedication;*” despite obstacles of health, exhaustion, pain, grief, loss, and pandemic, you are not deterred! In fact, this church and the members of the Mission Center collaborate to strengthen one another and encourage each other with every step; others are beginning to see our efforts and how God is bringing life back into this church because of your leadership qualities outlined in the Scriptures!

Leaders like you and me, as Christ followers, have a different way of seeing the world. Most people see problems, but leaders see the possibilities. Some people see obstacles, whereas leaders see only opportunities! The coming list of qualities is both a Scriptural and business definition for leadership excellence. If you don’t think of yourself as a leader yet, just listen. Leaders are excellent communicators; competent, fair minded, curious (like Ben Franklin and Thomas Edison who asked how I can fix this situation or thing); they are consistent by showing up and being ready to serve every day they said they would. Most leaders are lifelong learners and readers, sponges for absorbing new or historical information to apply to life. The W. Edwards Deming TQM leader has a strong desire for continued improvement in life and processes to ensure quality of products. Some leaders are inspiring thought leaders like Norman Vincent Peale and his international bestselling book “The Power of Positive Thinking” or today’s latest guru. Military leaders are courageous and willing to both take orders and to take risks, trying new approaches. As Paul taught Timothy, church leaders must demonstrate perseverance and a holy tenacity built on Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross.

Are you a natural problem solver? Then you are a leader! Do you love to teach or mentor the next generation, even though your children are

grown? Then let's find some new kids here to mentor. Are you yourself teachable or are you set in your ways and unwilling to change? Being a leader does not mean more work for you in your "retired" years. Being a leader means more energy and fun in your "re-energized" years of finishing well. Being a leader means responding appropriately to God's call in this season of your life.

Do you have these characteristics of leadership from our passages? Gratitude, generosity, putting people first, taking responsibility, sober judgment, a person of moral integrity, faithful, positive, passionate, disciplined, and consistent. Leaders are also willing to admit when they are wrong or have made a mistake. One video of the CEO of CrowdStrike admitted there was a software patch error which crashed IT systems at airports and hospitals this week. It has been horrible for many vacationers and medical facilities, yet he took responsibility. We'll see if he continues to do so, but I was impressed by his integrity and the reassurance it was not a hacker. That, despite the inconvenience, is leadership dedication, unlike some other industries full of excuses and blame-throwing.

The message of today is simple. Jesus was and still is a leader to be emulated and followed. Christianity is not a cult; it is truth. Jesus was the perfecter of our faith through his birth, temptation, baptism, teachings, trial, punishment on the cross, resurrection, and ascension. He is our focus today and every day. Will you follow this leader named Christ? Do you practice spiritual disciplines that support your leadership on earth doing Kingdom work? We are called to "fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2). Looking to a king or leader as a model, or to God for inspiration, was a common motif in literature of

the ancient world and still happens today with celebrities, politicians, and royalty. But for us, Jesus has run the “race” before us, and he offers the perfect example of how the race is to be run. He is of course our Savior, too. Let us lead by his example, forgoing the cross because he has overcome death. Let us re-dedicate ourselves to Christ-like leadership, renewing our baptismal confessions and living out our Spiritual and leadership gifts in community with one another. Amen. ||

Let us pray. Dear Lord, we humbly thank you today for these reminders of our responsibility to you and your Kingdom. We ask your Spirit to strengthen us and empower us every day to be your disciples, and to lead others to you until your return. Please give us each those traits and characteristics of an excellent Godly leader, so that we may serve you and your people better. Thank you, Jesus, for it is in your name we pray, **Amen.**