

## Good Friday Leaders

Prevailing leaders learn to survive dark times. Good Friday reminds us that making tough choices, surviving misunderstanding and betrayal was hard on Jesus. After three years of daily teaching, his closest associates still did not understand his vision for a new kingdom. When Jesus “set his face to go to Jerusalem,” he willingly faced the hard decision to die, not to reign and rule. Not the vision his followers had of a liberated Jerusalem, but the right one for a liberated humanity.

Leaders need more than followers, they need friends, close friends for good days and tough times. Jesus knew it was hard to be best-buds with twelve guys but three soul mates made a good foursome. So, on the darkest night of his career, he left the dozen after supper, gathered his three closest friends, and took them to a very sacred space - the place where he frequently prayed. Luke describes it:

“Jesus went out **as usual** to the Mount of Olives and his disciples followed him. On reaching **the** place, he said to them, “Pray....”

Ultimately, the hardest leadership decisions are solo decisions, reached in the agony of sacred deliberation. So Jesus left his friends to pray and walked a little further down the path where he could be close to them yet alone and closer to the Father. It was decision time: if he continued on the public course he had charted during the past couple of days he would be arrested, crucified as a traitor to the state, and then the mission would be left to a group of twelve who weren't ready to lead. A group whose inner core were that very moment proving they could not be depended on during this evening of greatest challenge.

To be let down, abandoned and sometimes betrayed by your friends is a danger all leaders recognize sometimes comes with the territory. For Jesus it was worse. In the hour of his greatest need, the One for whom he lived was deserting him. With a dehydrated body weak from torture, loss of blood and a broken heart, Jesus cried out for deliverance and help from his Father who was abandoning his son. It must have felt like the ultimate betrayal:

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me.”

Easter is almost here and before we rush to celebrating the victory of the empty tomb and the promise of new beginnings, leaders will do well to pause and reflect deeply on the lessons of Good Friday. Leadership is not all light; there are dark nights of the soul. Success is not without sacrifice and a feeling of failure. Our divine mission is not ours but our Father's and we are called to be obedient, even when it seems like He has abandoned us. But God has the last word and that is what Easter is all about. Like the old preacher used to say: “It may feel like Good Friday but Easter Sunday is comin’.”

We need ministers who will not only preach Easter sermons but lead Easter churches - churches that have died and come alive again. These churches are led by leaders who have died to their professional dreams and come to terms with frustration, failure and finally said, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” Only then is resurrection possible.

My prayers are with you this holy week, my fellow Middle District leaders. I will ask God to bless you on your ministry journey whether you are in the darkness of a disappointing Good Friday season of ministry or celebrating the bright victory of Easter Sunday morning.