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2/11/2018  
"Follow The Leader"  
2 Kings 2:1-12  
Mark 9:2-9

## Opening

- Have you ever played the kid's game "follow the leader"?
  - o You know, that game where somebody is the leader and everyone else has to follow them?
    - To go where they go and do what they do?
    - I remember playing follow the leader once in a while when I was a kid sometimes at school, and sometimes in the neighborhood.
  - o At school, the game was usually somewhat formal and organized, and it was usually pretty tame.
    - Kids would do things like walk around with their hand on their head, or hop on one foot for as long as they could.
  - o When we played follow the leader in the neighborhood, it was usually an informal, pick-up sort of a game.
    - The leader could do anything- and usually did.
    - The sky was the limit, and the more daring, the better!
  - o There was large wooded field, behind my house and across the street where I lived, and the neighborhood kids all liked to play there.
    - A creek ran through the woods, and there was a single-log bridge over the creek.
    - And I remember when we played follow the leader, one of my good friends was quite the outdoorsman and he'd frequently walk across that log, from one end to the other, to cross just above the running water in that creek.
      - And we had to do it without falling in!
        - o And it's a wonder that someone never did!
  - o But that was the name of the game- follow the leader.
    - You had to go where the leader went and you had to do what the leader did.
    - And if you followed correctly, you learned to do what the leader did, and you also learned that you could do some things that you never thought you could do.

## Transfiguration Sunday

- Today is Transfiguration Sunday on the liturgical calendar.
  - o It is a special Sunday when the church universal and local congregations celebrate the time Jesus went up on a mountain to pray

- And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white.
- The transfiguration is considered one of the most significant events in the gospel story of the life of Jesus, along with his baptism, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension.
- In Christian teachings, the transfiguration has been described as a pivotal moment where heaven and earth meet in a mountaintop setting, with Jesus himself as the connecting point between the two.
  - It was yet another sign that Jesus was the one chosen by God to reconcile the world to God.
- The designated gospel reading from the Lectionary for Transfiguration Sunday this year is the passage from Mark.
  - And the Old Testament reading for Transfiguration Sunday is 2 Kings 2:1-12. It is a story about the prophet Elijah and his soon-to-be successor, Elisha.
- As I read this passage from 2 Kings, it gave me the impression of two people engaged in follow the leader.
  - Elijah is the leader and Elisha is the follower.
  - Elijah knows that he is about to die, he just doesn't know where or when.
    - So, he starts out on a journey- first from Gilgal to Bethel; then to Jericho and finally to the river Jordan.
    - And each time he gets ready to move on, Elijah tells Elisha to stay behind, that it is the Lord that is sending him, but each time Elisha refuses, saying "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you."
  - Elisha is determined to follow Elijah- to go where he goes and do what he does.

### Succession Planning

- I think scripture as a whole and in particular this morning's readings, suggest that God has a succession plan in place.
- In the corporate world today, many businesses have what they call a "leadership succession plan."
  - That's true with the organization I lead.
    - I've selected people from within my organization whom will take over and lead the company, when I am no longer there.
      - It is a continuity strategy, for that day when I retire, or perhaps die unexpectedly or otherwise leave the company.
    - And I am preparing, or grooming, these people to be ready for their new roles when that time comes.
    - And I am grooming these replacements by acting as a mentor- a coach.
      - I am teaching them to do what I am doing.

- I am allowing them participate in my day, allowing time to follow along and watch and then for practice, to do what I am doing.
  - It's a corporate follow-the-leader.
- And I think that is what God is up to.
  - A sort of follow-the-leader plan, of God's own.
    - We get a glimpse of that plan in the gospel lesson from Mark, when Peter, and James and John follow their leader, Jesus, up to the mountaintop, where they see Moses and Elijah appear, and Jesus talks with them.
    - Peter is so excited he wants to preserve the moment by making some dwellings.
      - But instead, they hear a voice from a cloud that says, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!"
      - God affirms that Jesus has indeed received the mantle of leadership, as did Moses and Elijah.
      - Then Jesus goes back down the mountain, and the disciples follow him.
      - There is still much work to be done.
      - And little does Peter know that he too will become an important fourth member of God's leadership plan, as someday, he would take the mantle of leadership for Christ's church.

## **Elijah and Elisha**

- Elijah was a good leader.
  - He acted as a mentor to Elisha, teaching him everything he knew about being a faithful prophet of God's Word.
    - And Elisha was a good follower; wherever his leader, Elijah went, he also went.
    - And in time, Elisha learned to do what Elijah did; and when the time came, he took on the mantle of a prophet.
- With the Transfiguration story, Peter seems a bit slow to catch on to following the leader.
  - At first, he seems to kind of miss the point of the Transfiguration.
    - He doesn't know what to do and all he can think of is to say "Hey Jesus, let's make three dwellings- one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.
    - But then God's voice speaks, saying "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him."
    - And Peter gets it.
      - He begins to listen to and follow the leader.
  - And for the most part, Jesus' disciples were good at follow the leader.
    - Wherever Jesus went, they also went—to the towns, to the countryside, to friendly places like Jerusalem, to unfriendly places like Samaria, even to the garden of Gethsemane.

- And in time, they learned to do what Jesus did; and when the time came for the mantle of leadership to be passed, they became the leaders of the church.

### **Taking on the Characteristics of the Leader**

- It's interesting, if you follow the leader closely, you may find yourself taking on some of the characteristics of your mentor.
  - For example, you might notice that I tend to frown a lot when I'm deeply pondering something.
    - And if you ever walk with me, you might notice, I tend to walk very fast.
      - Both of those traits, I picked up from mentors I've had in my life.
      - The frowning, I picked up from one of the first bosses I had right out of college, when I became a tax collector.
      - John Stone was his name and John frowned a lot, when he was engaged in serious contemplation.
        - And I had a lot of respect for John as a fair-handed boss and as a leader.
        - And I spent a lot of time around him and eventually, I picked up that trait from him.
      - And the fast walking I picked up from my father.
        - He always walked SO fast when he went anywhere.
        - As a kid, I had to almost run, just to keep up with him.
        - And into adulthood, I and my father did many things together and he was always such a fast walker, that I naturally adopted that characteristic.

### **Christian Follow the Leader**

- Being a Christian is like, learning to follow the leader.
  - In our Christian life, we are called to go where Jesus goes and to do what Jesus would do.
    - Jesus will lead us to the poor.
      - And he will ask us to care for their needs.
    - Jesus will lead us to the grieving.
      - And he will ask us to comfort them.
    - Jesus will lead us to the sick.
      - And he will ask us to heal them.
    - Jesus will lead us to those imprisoned by oppression.
      - And he will ask us to free them.
    - Jesus will lead us to the stranger.
      - And he will ask us to welcome them.

- Jesus will lead us to the homeless.
  - And he will ask us to take them in, and make our home, their home.
- Jesus will lead us to places where there is conflict.
  - And he will ask us to be peacemakers.

- <PAUSE>

### **Wrap it up**

- Each of us has a role to play in God's leadership succession plan.
- And if we follow our leader Jesus long enough, and if we pay close enough attention to him, we just might take on some of his characteristics.
  - Like faithfulness to God's Word.
  - Boldness in proclaiming the good news.
  - Courage in speaking out against oppression.
  - Characteristics like kindness, gentleness, forgiveness, patience, thankfulness, and above all, an unlimited capacity for sharing God's love.
- The Transfiguration took place, because God the Father wanted to answer - definitively - once and for all – that Jesus is our leader and we are to follow him.
- May we follow the leader this day, and every day, now and forevermore. Amen.