

Leadership is a Challenge

1 Samuel 10:1, 17-25 and Acts 9:1-19

By Patty Friesen (Sept 10/17)

In Part 2 of our Leadership series from the Old and New Testament, we have two Sauls who are anointed by God and filled with the Holy Spirit and are given new hearts for leadership of God's people in dramatic conversion events. Most of us will not have such dramatic conversions but many of us enter leadership with similar reluctance and are empowered by God along the way, such as the deacon leadership training that Ben participated in with Mennonite Church Saskatchewan which was a life changing event.

In our first encounter with Saul from I Samuel, he seems insecure and inexperienced. Saul's servant seems more resourceful than Saul. The servant comes up with the idea to ask a seer about the missing donkeys and comes up with the money to pay him. Saul does nothing to appear ambitious or in any way seeking leadership, in fact, he doesn't even want it and hides among the baggage at his ordination. At this point he is a passive participant in the story of his destiny. He is chosen, but does not choose this path himself. God is in charge of this political election of a reluctant candidate. God has seen the suffering of God's people at the hands of the Philistines and acts to deliver them.

Samuel is to anoint Saul to be ruler over Israel. The word king is not used. Some have argued that Saul was not initially authorized as king but as some sort of military commander in the face of the Philistine threat. But Saul himself and the storyteller understand that Saul kept the matter of kingship to himself in verse 16. The act of anointing legitimizes Saul in this office, recognizing that God is the source of authorization.

We should anoint all leaders, all coaches, teachers and business people as a reminder that all positions of leadership are called by God for the good of the people being served. The person God needs and the occasion for claiming that person to God's purposes may present themselves in the most ordinary and unexpected circumstances. Despite leadership training events and Christian vocation conferences, Saul's story suggests that the key to leadership is that our energies must be devoted to listening for God's voice, which doesn't always come through formal leadership programs.

Saul was not a person of no real gifts miraculously transformed into a king. We cannot expect a sense of God's calling and authorization to give us gifts and talents we never had before. We can, however, expect that through the power of God's Spirit we can become persons that we never were before and the gifts we possess can be put to new purpose and given new focus by God. Saul has been given new opportunities for his life and those who saw Saul seized by the Holy Spirit after his anointing observed that something new and unsettling was indeed happening with Saul. Here is a new creation, everything old has passed away and see everything has become new. This is a story of God's initiative and God's Spirit as the source of newness for the people of Israel.

The same story repeats itself in Acts 9 with the conversion of the New Testament Saul. The resurrected Christ asserts authority in Saul's life which tells him to Get up and enter Damascus and you will be told what you are to do. Now there is someone else in control of his life. Little wonder that in Saul's later writings he talks about being a slave to Christ! Meanwhile, Ananias is called by God and he responds with Here I Am, Lord and he is told to go to the street called Straight and find a man named Saul who is praying and has been given a vision. This is like a vision within a vision, Ananias' vision to enter

Saul's vision. Ananias protests but God says Go and pray for Saul's healing, this great persecutor of the Christians. With great economy of words, Luke writes, So Ananias went and entered the house. There is no word about distance or of the thoughts racing through his mind on the way. Before we know it, Ananias is laying his hands on the praying persecutor. He is no longer archenemy Saul but is now Brother Saul – the two sweetest words in the New Testament. Healed of his resistance and fear, Ananias himself is a new man and can identify with this Christian in the making. He explains how the same Jesus who appeared to Saul, appeared to him too and sent him to Saul to cure his blindness and bestow the Holy Spirit. Saul is healed and is baptized and receives the Holy Spirit.

In these two Saul stories we have followers who become reluctant leaders and leaders who become followers of Christ. An important characteristic of leadership is also knowing how to be a good follower – to have the humility to learn from others and to seek and trust God's leadership in our lives...(sharing from a leader or more illustrations of leadership lessons and challenges.)