

## **Leadership is Stepping Up**

I Samuel 16:1-13, Isaiah 9:2-7, Luke 4:16-19

By Patty Friesen and Katherine Penner and Vanessa Stefaniuk (Sept 17/17)

In Part III in our trilogy of leadership stories in the Old and New Testaments, God again chooses a young person as a vessel of God's grace. Similar to Old Testament Saul's unlikely choice to kingship and New Testament Saul's unlikely choice as Christian evangelist, David the red-haired shepherd boy appears unlikely for leadership as well. Samuel overlooks David in the candidate line-up of Jesse's handsome tall sons but God saw his heart. This series has come full circle. At the beginning of Samuel's story, it was Eli who could not see, visions in Israel were rare, and the lamp of God was dim. New Testament Saul was blinded by his violence against Christians and then blinded by Jesus for healing and anointing by Ananias. Now it is Samuel who does not see clearly and God must directly indicate the proper choice of a new king. This is a drama of right seeing which flows into the gospels as the disciples and the crowds continually struggle to see Jesus as the Messiah, the anointed leader of God.

How much more do we also miss the possibility of grace and hope beyond the traditional channels of power, influence and success. God may be calling those who are customarily absent from the gatherings of power, those from the inner city, the elderly, immigrants and indigenous people. God's word that calls David to leadership is hopeful in such a time that God looks upon the heart and God can see past the preoccupation with image and appearance that characterizes our time.

Whereas King Saul came to leadership with reluctance and insecurity, David came to leadership with confidence and ease. He had already killed the giant Goliath

with complete trust in God's presence with him so being a king couldn't have been harder than that. Samuel had Eli as a mentor in leadership, Saul had Samuel and David had Saul but by the time David was rising in leadership, Saul was falling apart as a mentor and actually became an enemy of David, throwing spears at him and taking his daughter away from him and hunting him down to kill him. If Terri Lynn thinks she has a difficult mentor!

King David is held up in scripture as the perfect leader who rises from humble beginnings in the sheep pasture to winning the hearts of the people through his guerilla warfare against Israel's enemies to being an excellent musician and poet, penning many of the psalms. Scripture says David was a young person after God's own heart. But he failed as well in a horrific act where he used his power as king for sexual conquest of his neighbor Bathsheba and then murdered her husband. David wasn't really that sorry about it either until the prophet Nathan told him a story that held up the mirror of his actions and broke the mask of David's deceptions to himself, God and others. Then we have a truly heartbreaking confession and repentance that restores his relationship to God but the damage has been done to his leadership.

Yet God calls up Jesus from the line of David. The failed political kingship of Israel will be redeemed in the One who is not like any other king, the One who comes to heal the sick, feed the hungry and bind up the broken hearted and who ultimately offers his life in love for the world. The kind of leadership we see in Jesus turns every other kind of leadership on its head. The calling for each of us is to be a follower of Jesus and be the kind of leader he was for the sake of our communities.

In today's sermon sandwich, I will share an interview I had with Katherine Penner after church last Sunday. Katherine is the kind of leader, whom like many of you, does not want to speak up front in church but carries the quiet steady committed supportive leadership that is essential in youth group, school and church. It's not always the public speakers that are the leaders but the behind the scene folks that get the work done.

When I first came to Osler Mennonite three years ago, Katherine was quite shy and withdrawn but it has been a joy to see her blossom in confidence, intelligence and a wicked sense of humour. I appreciated working with her on the pastoral search committee last year and when the rest of us would finally stop talking, she would quietly come up with brilliant insights and perspectives the rest of us had not thought of. I appreciated also two years ago when she did share up front here about her Alternative Learning and Service Opportunity with Rosthern Junior College when she worked in Riversdale neighbourhood in Saskatoon and met some interesting people on the street and what a life-changing experience that was. I appreciated last year, when she and Vanessa sharing about their life-changing service in Alabama and the powerful encounters they had with people who were very different from white Mennonite girls from Saskatchewan.

This year Katherine is a senior and this is a busy year for her. There are only 17 in the 2018 graduating class at Rosthern Junior College and she says that everyone has to step up and provide leadership this year. There can be no slackers or nothing will happen for their graduating class. Katherine and Adam are serving on the dorm council and Katherine is serving on the Saskatchewan Mennonite Youth Organization SMYO who will hopefully come and lead a worship service for us in the New Year. Katherine is also our youth delegate to the Mennonite Church Canada Conference in Winnipeg next

month. I hope Katherine never leaves home so we can put her leadership to work here at church for years to come.

Vanessa Stefaniuk came to our church two and a half years ago shortly before she was baptized at Superb Mennonite Church where she grew up in western Saskatchewan. From the get-go Vanessa was extroverted and didn't mind reading scripture or doing children's time. Her mom Barb, as an English teacher, worked with her on public speaking and she would have spoken from the pulpit this morning but she also is a busy senior at Rosthern Junior College. While Vanessa is comfortable and gifted at public speaking and will make a convincing lawyer (her dad says she is very good at making rational arguments), her core gift of leadership is in her one on one relationships at school and especially at Camp Shekinah as counselor in training these past two years. The girls in Vanessa's cabin loved her as she accepted them and guided them and encouraged them in activities and homesickness. And there will always be a bond with those girls from those intense weeks of camp. We also hope Vanessa never leaves home and continues to provide leadership for our congregation for years to come.

We discussed at council that we want to be a congregation that mentors young people into leadership, through supporting them going to camp and Vacation Bible School and youth group and through more official mentorship programs offered through Canadian Mennonite University and Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary. We have had students from CMU work for us before, Val Smith and Sarah Buhler who are both in leadership positions now.

My own leadership arose from my home congregation in northern Alberta, Bluesky Mennonite Church where at age 15, I had to lead a Vacation Bible School class

and teach the Grade 5 Sunday School class and plan a Sunday evening worship service. My home church never intended that leadership of women should go beyond that into pastoral ministry but once they got the ball rolling, they couldn't stop it, even though our conference minister met with me during my second year at Canadian Mennonite Bible College to talk me out of pastoral ministry because he believed the Bible didn't support women in ministry. While in Voluntary Service at Western Mennonite High School in Salem, Oregon, I was called to Portland Mennonite Church and was ordained as a youth pastor there. And at that service, one of our 90-year-old elders, Dan Newsinger stood up and said, "I don't believe God calls women into ministry but you're alright!" Dan continued to be a supporter and Scrabble partner despite his theological struggles with women in ministry.

God has a sense of humour when it comes to calling people into leadership, whether it is shepherd boys or introverts or conservative Mennonite girls. As followers, we will need to humbly seek discernment and be open to whom God may be calling into leadership in the future. It may surprise and confuse us. Let us pray:

Gracious God, thank you for the gentle and humorous and surprising ways you call us into things we would have never imagined doing. Help us to step up when you are prodding and hold our shaking hands. Amen.