

## “The Servant of God”

The Rev Drew Willard  
UCC at The Villages, FL  
October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2012,  
20<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
*Shepherds' Commissioning*

Hebrews 5:1-10

Mark 10:17-31

*‘And Jesus looking upon [the rich, young man] loved him, and said to him,  
"You lack one thing; go, sell what you have, and give to the poor,  
and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."’*

*Mark 10:21*

Let us pray... O God,  
Strengthen us to your good purpose; Don't let us let you down  
for Heaven's sake and for the sake of our common good.

Amen

‘Sell what you have, and give to the poor...’

Probably not what our Stewardship Committee would prefer to hear –  
unless that could mean helping the church meet our financial obligations  
as a way of helping the poor.

The Fundraising Committee certainly welcomes this concept –  
while hoping for a more direct contribution to the Church Yard Sale.

However, it is not clear from our Gospel story  
whether Jesus expected us all to do this  
or whether it is a special calling for those on the road to sainthood.

The following quote is attributed to Princess Diana:

*They say it is better to be poor and happy than rich and miserable,  
but how about a compromise like moderately rich and just moody?*

Not everyone is called to be a saint. Not everyone is expected to be  
martyred for the cause, though that happens – but not by seeking it.

God calls us into such situations to make a stand  
when there is no hope for immediate, measurable success,  
and no one else to bear witness for the greater good in the long run.

An example is Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani girl who was shot  
on a school bus for her public stand of advocating women's education  
and denouncing the Taliban.

She miraculously survived and has become a national hero,  
inspiring common folks to take to the streets  
and protest extremism in their country.

We are not all asked to make that kind of stand.

And none of us can be expected to be all things to everyone.

But we can all grow in our knowledge of what we can do to serve God.

Willard, p.2

Our Bible is filled with examples of what it means to be a servant of God –  
like the Parable of the Good Samaritan who stopped to help  
a wounded person even though it could've been a trap.

The Samaritan would've always had his guard up, traveling in Jewish Galilee;  
So, he was in a better position than the priest or the religious lay person.

Being street-smart and in his case, compassionate, too, he knew the risks.

And so, he was able to help in ways that he could  
and also knew when to stop and where to get help.

And that is good advice for any of us – especially those of you  
who have been commissioned as Shepherds today:

You are not called to get in over your heads –  
just do what you can and get help when you need it,  
so that you can serve joyfully.

Being a Servant of God can seem more like of a burden than a joy –  
the young man who seemed so enthusiastic at first when he came to Jesus,  
went away confused and disheartened.

When Jesus said it was easier to get a camel through the eye of a needle  
than to get a rich person into God's Kingdom,  
even the disciples – who were all working-class guys, balked at this,  
wondering who could be saved at all.

They were not rich, but – like any of us, they hoped to be successful in life,  
to provide for themselves and their loved ones.

And Jesus' words seemed to challenge the common-sense wisdom of  
simply working hard to better their lot.

Yet he was trying to get them to look at life differently –  
to take a broader view.

Jesus reassured them that there was a way –  
but it was not a matter of buying your way into Heaven  
or by being clever or strong.

Having political influence or financial affluence wouldn't make a difference  
like it often does in this world.

But just by being open to God's grace we can find our way  
into that Beloved Community that is possible  
in this world as well as the next.

And don't we really know that not all riches are monetary?

Isn't that which is most precious to you  
"someone" rather than "something"?

And even pets count that way with some of us.

Willard, p.3

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches us to

“Store your treasures in Heaven where moth and rust and thief cannot touch them.

For where your heart is, that is where your treasure will be.”

19th century author, Oscar Wilde put it this way:

*Ordinary riches can be stolen, real riches cannot.*

*In your soul are infinitely precious things  
that cannot be taken from you.*

UCC theologian Kate Huey wrote in her reflections this week

about Francis of Assisi, whose life is traditionally celebrated on October 4<sup>th</sup> by many denominations – usually as a “Blessing of the Animals”, which we will do later this afternoon.

Kate Huey referred to the conversion event of Francis’ life

which was dramatically portrayed in the film, “Brother Sun, Sister Moon”.

Francis was born to live a life of privilege as the son of a textile merchant,

but he went off to war and came back delirious with fever and heartsick.

During his convalescence, he gave away his father’s merchandise – clothing to the poor.

His father was incensed by this and dragged his son into the town square for the bishop to punish him.

Instead, Francis spoke up for himself and shed his clothes, his heritage –

even his name which he gave back to his parents along with his folded tunic.

Then he declared that he had been born again

and went off to live a life of a beggar and Servant of God.

As Kate Huey writes:

*Francis was not just ill; he was hungry and thirsty and lost.*

*His conversion experience came in the midst of suffering and uncertainty...*

He was that rich, young man who now returns to Christ

ready to accept the invitation Jesus offered him

for a richer life in relationship, disencumbered from  
of only chasing after things.

And though it wouldn’t always be a smooth road for Francis,

he brought renewal and joy to the Church

in a time of disillusionment and decay.

Responding to a theophany that told him to “Rebuild my church”,

Francis worked to literally restore a ruined chapel, stone by stone –  
but his influence has continued to challenge us to this day.

Willard, p.4

You don't have to be a Francis to serve.

You don't have to be a Mahatma Gandhi to serve.

You don't have to be a Mother Teresa or Martin Luther King  
or Malala Yousafzai to serve.

And in many ways, you are already serving God through this church.

So, thank you –

Thank you in advance to those of you who stepped up today  
to be counted as Shepherds.

Thank you for those of you who have been serving  
as officers and committee members,  
now, in years that have passed, and for the years ahead.

Thank you in advance for being volunteers  
at our Church Yard Sale and Chicken Barbeque and other special events.

Thank you for helping out with the Church Office  
when our Administrative Assistant is away.

Thank you for those of you who have contributed  
to our special requests for the Discretionary Fund, Food Pantry,  
Mission Kits, and Prayer Shawls  
and seasonal requests that make us a “5 For 5” church in the UCC.

Thank you for your weekly offerings that fulfill your Stewardship pledge  
and keep the lights on.

Thank you for your donations of printer cartridges and soda can pull-tabs  
that benefit charitable causes outside of our own.

That also includes a thank you for participating in CROP Walks,  
Habitat For Humanity, and our local Hospice.

Thank you to all who lead Bible studies, coordinate Forums, organize receptions  
and generally support these activities by attending them”

Thank you, especially, on behalf of all those who benefit from all these ministries  
associated with our church as well as those whom you meet on occasions  
when you least expect, and for are making a difference in  
the lives of those you happen to meet as well as those you know and love.

And thank you for the help you have given me as your pastor –  
and by the way, it has been 16 years since I was ordained.

Martin Luther King, Jr. said,

*Everybody can be great...because anybody can serve.*

So, thank you, everybody.

Amen

*Our lesson from Hebrews 5:1-10 reminds us that the role of a priest carries great responsibility.  
To be a priest is not so much a career choice as it is a response to a calling...*

Every high priest is appointed to help others  
by offering gifts and sacrifices to God because of their sins.  
A high priest has weaknesses of his own,  
and he feels sorry for foolish and sinful people.  
That is why he must offer sacrifices for his own sins  
and for the sins of others.  
But no one can have the honor of being a high priest  
simply by wanting to be one.  
Only God can choose a priest,  
and God is the one who chose Aaron.  
That is how it was with Christ.  
He became a high priest,  
but not just because he wanted the honor of being one.  
It was God who told him,  
“You are my Son, because today I have become your Father!”  
In another place, God says,  
“You are a priest forever just like Melchizedek.”  
God had the power to save Jesus from death.  
And while Jesus was on earth,  
he begged God with loud crying and tears to save him.  
He truly worshiped God,  
and God listened to his prayers.  
Jesus is God’s own Son,  
but still he had to suffer before he could learn  
what it really means to obey God.  
Suffering made Jesus perfect,  
and now he can save forever all who obey him.  
This is because God chose him to be a high priest like Melchizedek.

Inspired by Mark 10:17-31

And as Jesus was setting out on the road,

someone ran up to him and knelt before him, to ask him this...

“Good Rabbi! What should I do to insure that I receive eternal life?”

Yet Jesus said to him,

“Why are you calling me good?

No one, but no one is good except God.

Do you know the commandments?

Don't commit adultery; Don't commit murder; Don't steal;

Don't lie for your advantage; Don't cheat; Respect your elders?”

And he answered him, saying,

“Rabbi, I have kept all of them since I was a child.”

Then Jesus looked at him with great affection and said,

“There's one thing left to do:

Sell what you have and give the proceeds to the poor

and you will be storing up treasure in Heaven.

Then, follow me by taking up your cross.”

But these words sobered him up,

and he went away grieving because he owned many things.

And Jesus looked around, saying to his disciples,

“How gut-wrenching it is for those with money

to enter the Beloved Community of God's Kingdom!”

Yet his disciples were confused by what he said,

So, Jesus answered them again, saying,

“My dear ones, how gut-wrenching it is for those with money,

to enter the Beloved Community of God's Kingdom!

It would be about as easy as pulling a camel through the eye of a needle

to get a rich person to enter God's Beloved Community.”

And they were very distressed, saying to each other,

“How could anyone be saved?”

And Jesus looked at each of them, saying,

“By human scheming, it is impossible,

but with God's help – anything is possible.”

Then, Peter the Rock began to say to him,

“Look, we left everything behind to follow you!

But Jesus answered him saying,

“I'm telling you the truth,

anyone who leaves home or brothers or sisters or father or mother

or spouse or children or fields for my sake and the Good News,

will get them back a hundred-fold

and – despite persecutions, eternal life in the world to come.

So, many who are first in line in this life, will be last;

And the last will be first.”

Mark 10:17-31

[17] And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

[18] And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.

[19] You know the commandments: `Do not kill, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother."

[20] And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have observed from my youth."

[21] And Jesus looking upon him loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."

[22] At that saying his countenance fell, and he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions.

[23] And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!"

[24] And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!

[25] It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

[26] And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, "Then who can be saved?"

[27] Jesus looked at them and said, "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God."

[28] Peter began to say to him, "Lo, we have left everything and followed you."

[29] Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel,

[30] who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.

[31] But many that are first will be last, and the last first."

## **Focus Theme**

What Must I Do?

## **Weekly Prayer**

God, you promise never to forsake us, but to bring us to life, nurture us with your presence, and sustain us even in the hour of death. Meet us in our deepest doubts when we feel abandoned, drowning in our fear of your absence. Visit us in the tension between our yearning and our anger, that we may know your mercy and grace in our time of need. Amen.

## **Reflection**

by Kate Huey

The rich man in this week's passage from Mark appears to be nagged by a deep inner sense that something isn't quite right, not quite complete, about his life. This is no adversary questioning Jesus; the religious authorities aren't in the scene, expressing their opinions or trying to trap Jesus. In a way, perhaps, they're present implicitly in the man's claim to have always followed the commandments. He's taken their advice, their teaching, to heart. Is this man arrogant because he so easily claims to have followed all the commandments since childhood? Where is his humility? And who can follow all the commandments and not make major mistakes? But that's not the point: rather, he has done what was expected of him as a faithful and observant Jew, and that is a good thing. However, he is struggling with a deep hunger that tells him that there is even more to life than doing what is expected of him. Today we might call him a "seeker," but we assume that most seekers have not been paying much attention to religious laws and requirements. In fact, we tend to think of seekers as "unchurched," and we may think that we need to teach them how to live as faithful disciples of Jesus. But what if there are many seekers already in our congregations? What if there are many people in our pews, and even among our church leaders, who sense that there is something "more," and just doing what's expected of them isn't enough? What if, even within the church, we are still hungering for grace? What if church-going Christians still feel a deep need for transformation in their lives?

In Franco Zeffirelli's beautiful film, "Brother Sun, Sister Moon," a turning point in the story comes when Francis of Assisi, born and raised in a wealthy and privileged (and religiously observant) family, stands before the entire town, including the local bishop and his parents, strips off his clothes, and walks off into the mountains to live among the poor as a beggar. Francis is responding to a call that has troubled him since he returned, ill with fever, from the adventure of fighting in a war between petty nobles. His life before the war no longer makes sense, and he feels his soul being pulled toward a different way of living, a radical giving up of everything that would have been easily his, a turning away from the comfortable path that has been laid out before him. Francis was not just ill; he was hungry and thirsty and lost. His conversion experience came in the midst of suffering and uncertainty.

The rich man in this week's passage from Mark does not appear to be similarly afflicted, although he too is apparently nagged by a deep inner sense that something isn't quite right, not quite complete, about his life. This is no adversary questioning Jesus; the religious authorities aren't in the scene, expressing their opinions or trying to trap Jesus. In a way, perhaps, they're present implicitly in the man's claim to have always followed the commandments. He's taken their advice, their teaching, to heart. I used to think this man was arrogant because he so easily

claimed to have followed all the commandments since childhood. Where was his humility? And who can possibly follow all the commandments and not make a few major mistakes along the way? But that's not the point: rather, this man is saying that he has done what was expected of him as a faithful and observant Jew, and that is a good thing. However, he is struggling with a deep hunger that tells him that there is even more to life than just doing what is expected of him.

The laws of any (true) religion are a gift, a path laid out for us, a set of guideposts when we're not sure of the way. Jesus, in his response, isn't quoting a law or laying a mandate on this man. He is opening a door to the next stage, the next step, on this man's journey of faith. Again, Zeffirelli provides a magnificent visual for this kind of experience, as Francis walks away from the town and out toward the countryside and the mountains. There is so much more ahead for him, not all of it pleasant or easy, and yet so rich and so full of power. When the church was at a particularly low time in terms of integrity in its practice, when wealth and worldly power had led it away from its central core, Francis was the breath of fresh air who led to a time of renewal and rediscovery of the church's basic call to faithfulness. "Rebuild my church, Francis," was the call he heard, and while he labored with stone (literally) to rebuild the crumbled sanctuary of San Damiano, his passionate response to the call to give everything away and follow Jesus was an inspiration that sparked a renewal of the whole church.

Today we might call the rich man in Mark's story a seeker, and yet we assume that most seekers have not necessarily been paying much attention to religious laws and requirements. In fact, we tend to think of seekers as "unchurched," and we may be tempted to think that we need to teach them how to live as faithful disciples of Jesus. But what if there are many seekers already in our congregations? What if there are many people in our pews, and even among our church leaders, who sense that there is something "more," and just doing what's expected of them isn't enough? What if, even within the church, we are still hungering for grace? What if church-going Christians still feel a deep need for transformation in their lives?

Of course, it's always risky to move between two very different economic and cultural settings, and it's important to acknowledge the differences between the time of Jesus and our own. However, there are certainly lessons here for us. Dianne Bergant notes that Jesus includes a commandment ("do not defraud") in his list that isn't in the Ten Commandments we know so well. Perhaps this is especially significant because it emphasizes that this man has gotten his wealth in ways that are proper and not "ill-gained" (*Preaching the New Lectionary Year B*). However, David Watson argues that in a world where there were only two classes, the super-rich and the impoverished, those who had wealth enjoyed it at the expense of those who went without. Watson sees the rich man as benefitting, intentionally or not, from the suffering of others, and this suffering deeply wounded, and continues to wound, the heart of God. We know that care of the poor and a just sharing of resources is at the heart of the prophets' proclamations throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, and yet we so easily slip into the same assumptions about wealth and possessions being a sign of God's favor that our ancestors held. Watson, then, claims that the rich man must make amends for the way his wealth has come at the expense of others (*New Proclamation Year B 2009*). And that lesson is still applicable today, even in very different economic and cultural conditions, because those who enjoy an excess of material things surely have a responsibility toward the millions of people who go hungry and homeless.

Preachers and readers of this Gospel story have tried to work with its difficult teaching in a way that makes it more palatable. If the "eye of the needle" (in the wall of the city) is reduced to an uncomfortable maneuver by a camel (as I was taught), "getting into" the kingdom of God (or

heaven, as I was taught) may be difficult but certainly not impossible. We'll just have to work a little harder at it (spiritual over-achievers will surely succeed?); it's easy to miss the part about God making seemingly impossible things possible. Is it any wonder that we have so little understanding of grace?

Most commentators describe our possessions as things that can possess us, or provide security, or distract us from God. Charles Cousar recognizes that this is true not just of money but of everything that possesses, or perhaps consumes, us and our "ultimate concern," including "ambition, education, religion and the like." But Cousar cautions us from shying away from a focus on material things, because they hold such power in our lives, and in the eyes and workings of the world. He reminds us that the followers of Jesus live in "a critical tension" with the world in which we minister and strive to live faithfully, a world that values wealth and power and may find the gospel most offensive. And yet, Cousar writes, this same world "needs the constant reminder that the first will be last and the last first" (*Texts for Preaching Year B*).

When the rich man waits for Jesus' answer to his question, he receives a response that is unusual in the Gospels, one of the most beautiful lines in Scripture: "Jesus, looking at him, loved him..." (10:21). Fred Craddock writes, "The man asked a big question and he got a big answer; small answers to ultimate questions are insulting" (*Preaching through the Christian Year B*). Craddock's insightful use of the word "ultimate" suggests that this is no complex or nuanced or obscure teaching for specialists in theology. This is the big question, the heart of the matter, the path for us to follow. Its simplicity, however, does not make it any easier to swallow, for the rich man or for us, his descendants in faith today.

Perhaps that is why the story is particularly poignant, because Jesus does not deliver this instruction in a way that is harsh or oppressive. As he looks tenderly at the man, seeing into his heart and knowing him at his deepest level, we sense that his teaching is meant to free the man from everything that holds him bound, all the possessions that possess him. Megan McKenna sees the teaching as both an invitation "to join the inner circles of his family" and as a challenge to do the difficult thing that will restore his relationship to those on the margins of his life, those most in need of justice and generosity (*On Your Mark: Reading Mark in the Shadow of the Cross*). Jesus asks us that same question today, in a time when many have too much and too many have not enough. What is our response to the invitation of Jesus?

We have been accompanying Jesus on his way to Jerusalem as he encounters and engages the religious "insiders" who come up short each time, missing the main point and often going away angry, even plotting to kill Jesus. Or perhaps the insiders are Jesus' own followers, who also miss the point and fail to grasp who Jesus is and what he is about. The Syrophenician woman, for example, a pagan woman, of all people, could see the power of Jesus and the heart of his mission more clearly than the disciples could. (They were too busy fretting over the feeding of crowds and the nuisance of children.) However, Andre Resner, Jr. observes that this story is different from those accounts. Here the insiders get it, and the outsider who appears to have it all together is the one who misses the mark. This time, for once, the disciples get it right, and have left everything behind to follow Jesus. Instead of frustration, Jesus' words to the disciples are full of promise and reassurance that they will receive an abundance of good things in return. Resner observes that Jesus "draws a line in the sand" for this man, because this is a matter of ultimate concern for him, and for everyone who is too comfortable, in any age. However, it's not about getting to heaven but living the abundant life now: "Take care of where your heart, where your life, is now" (*The Lectionary Commentary: The Gospels*).

Paul Wadell has written a lovely reflection on this text in the October 6, 2009, issue of *The Christian Century*. He focuses on our hearts, and the "perplexing mysteries" within that make us "most afraid of what we most need." This man, Wadell writes, runs to Jesus, illustrating the urgency of his quest. He is restless, and unsatisfied, and in spite of his riches, he is needy, for he stands in need of what matters most, the thing that he can't count or accumulate or achieve or take credit for. And yet the treasure he needs and hungers for is the one thing that matters most, the one thing that is secure in this life: God's grace. Along with the line about Jesus looking at the man and loving him is the poignant account of his walking away "grieving, for he had many possessions." Wadell observes that the young man knows in his heart that Jesus is right, and that makes him sad and grieving as he walks back to what he has not found satisfying all along. However, Wadell claims that "Love is a way of seeing, and those who love us best see us best," so "Jesus sees him as he truly is, but in a way that the young man is not yet capable of seeing himself." Perhaps, in the days that followed, the man re-thought his decision, just as we might re-think our own lives, and listen to that same call to come, follow Jesus. Will we respond with joy, or will we walk away, grieving?

### **For Further Reflection**

*Oscar Wilde, 19th century*

Ordinary riches can be stolen, real riches cannot. In your soul are infinitely precious things that cannot be taken from you.

*Ernest Hemingway, 20th century*

Fear of death increases in exact proportion to increase in wealth.

*Princess Diana, 20th century*

They say it is better to be poor and happy than rich and miserable, but how about a compromise like moderately rich and just moody?

*Ernesto Tinajero, 21st century*

If you read the Bible and it does not challenge you, then you are reading yourself and not the Bible.

*Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 19th c.*

Things which matter most must never be at the mercy of things which matter least.

*Daisy Goodwin, 21st century*

...anyone can acquire wealth, the real art is giving it away.

## **Servant Leadership: The Answer to Leading From Behind**

Leading From Behind with Servant Leadership

Whether you are the CEO of a Wall Street darling, managing a 3rd generation main street business or reforming social injustices, one thing is certain – we all feel behind today. From corporate scandals to our economic crisis, poor leadership has

created obstacles for us all. Therefore, how we get out of this mess will take a different type of leadership. We need leaders that inspire us. Leaders motivated by something greater than themselves. Leaders focused on sustainable success over hollow, short-term gains. What we need is Servant Leadership. With servant leaders leveraging technology and a focus on the right results, yes we can, lead from behind.

Leading from behind starts with the right character, vision and selflessness to inspire; traits that servant leaders Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. and Mother Teresa exemplified. These individuals all led from behind, knew there was a better way and forged the path to success through service to those they led. However, servant-leadership is effective in any field, not just social reform. Consider, for example, servant leaders in business like Herb Kelleher, Sam Walton and Max DePree. Kelleher created and led Southwest airlines to be among the most successful companies, bucking one of the most devastating trends in its industry. Fortune Magazine even referred to Kelleher as perhaps the best CEO in America. This servant leader emphasized that people take themselves lightly, but their jobs seriously. As an example of service to those he led, Kelleher was known to spend holidays loading baggage with ground crews.

Like Kelleher, Sam Walton knew the key to success was serving the people that served the organization. Walton was famous for saying, "The folks on the front lines – the ones who actually talk to the customer – are the only ones who really know what's going on out there." Walton also taught that customers were the real boss, not the stockholders.

Both Kelleher and Walton's beliefs aligned with Max DePree, former CEO and Chairman of Herman Miller, one of America's foremost furniture manufactures. DePree wrote "Leadership is an Art" and "Leadership Jazz". Both books received praise from President Clinton and other famous leaders. DePree stated, "The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between, the leader is a servant."

Many more examples of servant leaders in business exist, like Howard Behar of Starbucks fame or Ken Melrose from the turnaround of Toro Company. There are also other companies that found success through servant leadership, companies like Medtronic, Service Master and Marriott International. Furthermore, leadership experts in academia frequently proclaim the need for servant leadership, like Jim Collins' did in his book Good To Great.

Those who follow the path of servant leadership will have something in their favor – technology. Advances in social technologies are shifting the balance of power to the masses, thus increasing the demand for effective servant leadership and empowering those who leverage it. One recent example was the success of Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign. This "community organizer" used servant leadership, empowered by effective social technologies, to help win his election. Numbers like 6.5 million online donations, 13 million email addresses, 35,000 volunteer groups, his own social networking site, 70 million online fundraisers and over 400,000 blog posts all played an undeniable factor in the election. Servant leaders today will leverage social technology tools for the success of their organizations.

When we take this opportunity to perform as servant leaders, we will ensure the future success of our organizations and our communities. How then, will leaders recognize success at leading from behind? I believe Robert K. Greenleaf the father of modern servant-leadership put it best when he said:

"The best test, and difficult to administer, is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit or at least not be further deprived?"

When answering affirmatively to these questions, the effective leader will recognize they are no longer leading from behind the curve, but ahead of it.

**NOTE:** The above post was originally written in February for "The [Bill George Challenge](#)" on ExecuNet ([www.ExecuNet.com](http://www.ExecuNet.com)). The challenge was to describe a leadership style that would adapt to a more participatory management practice, listing role models you would reference and how you would measure results. The challenge was placed in the framework of President Obama's call to action for everyone to take responsibility and participate in solving the challenges we face.

<http://modernservantleader.com/servant-leadership/servant-leadership-the-answer-to-leading-from-behind/>

## Benjamin Lichtenwalner

Hello, I'm Ben, founder of MSL. I use this site to promote Servant Leadership awareness, adoption and action. I'm also an advisor to [Philanthropist.org](http://Philanthropist.org) and the Senior Manager of Internet and eCommerce at [Whirlpool Corporation](http://Whirlpool Corporation). In the past, I've held senior leadership roles and overseen technology teams across other Fortune 500, Inc. 500 and non-profit corporations. Having learned from both positive and negative leadership styles, I now share my experiences and lessons learned to promote greater awareness of [Servant Leadership](http://Servant Leadership).

### Christiane Amanpour's blog

*Editor's Note: Gayle Lemmon, author of the New York Times best-seller *The Dressmaker of Khair Khana*, is a fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. The views expressed are solely those of the author.*

The attempted assassination in Pakistan of fourteen-year-old Malala Yousafzai by Taliban shooters is only the latest and most brazen attack on leaders brave enough to defy death threats and fight for a girl's right to go to school.

Earlier this week gunmen boarded Malala's school van, asked for her by name and shot her. The teenager now fights for her life in a hospital and receives visits from dignitaries who until her attempted assassination had not dared to challenge publicly the kind of extremism that views educated girls as an existential threat.

But there are many Malalas whose stories rarely are heard. Just as this courageous girl refused to silently abandon her right to education even at the risk of losing her life, women and men fight daily against a worldview that considers girls' schools a call to action in their battle against modernity. Only Wednesday these fighters struck again in Afghanistan, bombing a girls' high school in the largely peaceful Bamyan province. And their stories serve as a reminder of the stakes involved in the fight against extremism and for modernity.

### [Pakistan's FM: Malala attack possible turning point for Pakistan](#)

Khan Mohammad is one of these unheralded citizens battling the extremism that seeks to overtake his country. The head of the Porak girls' school in Logar province, a mere hour from Afghanistan's capital, Khan Mohammad ignored a series of Taliban warnings to stop teaching his students. In May 2011 Taliban shooters ended his fight to educate half the country with a series of bullets. He died near his home. Few headlines attended his murder, but he is and was not alone in his quest to keep girls in school.

For years I have interviewed young women as courageous and committed as Malala and Khan Mohammad who refuse to submit to threats to abandon their education and their future dreams. One young midwife told me that she decided to pursue her profession to save women's lives after her father rushed her out of Kandahar during the Taliban's rule of Afghanistan in the late 1990s. It seems a Taliban fighter wanted to marry her – an offer her father could never have refused – so he invented a family wedding in Pakistan and whisked all of his daughters back to Kabul where they lived until the Taliban fell in 2001. As soon as schools reopened in 2002 her father insisted she return to her studies. In 2004 she joined the first class of midwifery training.

This year the fight to keep girls in school has grown even tougher as the Taliban turns classrooms into battlefronts to a greater extent than ever before. The United Nations mission in Afghanistan says it verified 34 attacks against schools in just the first six months of this year, “including cases of burnings of school buildings, targeted killings and intimidation of teachers and school officials, armed attacks against and occupation of schools, and closures, particularly of girls’ schools.” Note the targeted killing of teachers and educators such as Khan Mohammad. And let us ask ourselves why, exactly, their fight matters?

Often I am asked whether we are “imposing America’s views” when it comes to promoting girls’ education in a country like Afghanistan? My answer is that those pushing this struggle forward are not foreign. They are people like Khan Mohammad, the teachers assassinated simply for going to work and the young midwife whose father pushed her to get an education and pursue her dreams of a career. All that the world can do is to support these homegrown education fighters.

Investing in girls’ education provides among the highest returns around when it comes to goals ranging from greater food security to more robust economic growth. According to a 2004 report from Barbara Herz and Gene Sperling, every additional year of primary education offers women a 10 to 20 percent increase in earnings, and each additional year of secondary education can increase future wages by 15 to 25 percent. As the World Bank notes, increasing the number of women who complete secondary education by merely 1 percent boosts annual per capita income growth by .3 percent. And in a desperately poor country like Afghanistan where per capita GDP hovers around \$500, every bit of growth is needed.

But beyond the economic benefits, girls’ education fosters stability. Nobel Prize winner Amarty Sen argues that “perhaps there is no clearer route to economic development, political stability, and ultimately peace, than education.” Today close to 40 million of the 70 million children who are out of school come from countries struggling against armed conflict. And as Education Secretary Arne Duncan has said, “a better-educated world is a safer world because low educational attainment is one of the few statistically significant predictors of violence.”

And yet violence is what continues to greet those who say simply that going to school and educating girls is not a crime, but a right. Each day they venture out, unknown and unarmed, facing an adversary that sees homegrown leaders like Khan Mohammad as threats to be vanquished. But assassinating Khan Mohammad and shooting Malala Yousafzai will not extinguish girls’ desire to create their own, brighter future for themselves, their families and their communities, no matter where they are in the world.

Their push against forces that would take their countries backward in time and for the education that makes stability and prosperity possibility is a high-stakes battle. And everyone who desires a more peaceful world has a stake in the outcome.

<http://amanpour.blogs.cnn.com/2012/10/12/the-malalas-youll-never-meet/>

