

Leadership

Romans 12:8d

Sermon Transcript by Reverend Ernest O'Neill

Last Sunday evening I tried to explain the situation in Northern Ireland because I had been there the previous week. I tried to explain what I thought was the cause of that situation. One of the strangest incidents that we mentioned was that event perhaps a year or two ago at Belfast Airport when one group of extremists -- gunmen from the Protestant side -- filed into a plane, and another group of extremists -- from the IRA Provisional side -- filed into the same plane. It must have been the only time when they were on one plane together. The plane took off and its destination was Libya for the First International Conference on Terrorists. Of course that is what we see in Northern Ireland repeatedly -- the hand of terrorism, and not simply the hand of Irish terrorism, but the hand of international terrorism.

Now what is it that so frightens you and me about the extent of terrorism today? I think we would all answer the same way. The terrorist who plants a bomb in a brown paper bag in a department store or in a crowded airport is not bent on destroying any definite, carefully chosen target. He is not bent even on attaining any carefully disciplined goals. He is bent simply on anarchy. He is determined to create the destruction of what little order there is in our society. That is what frightens all of us. We see terrorism as an animal that is different from all the other dreadful monsters that have attacked our world. Terrorism seems bent on anarchy; on rulelessness. That is what the word means. An-archy. "Arkhos" in Greek is "rule" and "an" is "not" -- no rule; rulelessness. I think we all know that that is the final enemy that we as a world have to face.

Wherever you and I touch anarchy we begin to believe that that is the start of the slide of civilization into the jungle of savagery. Even the little instances we remember of mob violence at school, those odd glimpses we got of it when we saw a group doing something without any mind or sense, made us feel that anarchy is actually the final enemy that will destroy our civilization. We know, too, that the history of mankind is that delicate balance between personal freedom and communal order that preserves my freedom in such a way that my freedom does not spoil your freedom. We know that that is a delicate balance, and we sense that anarchy is the force that will eventually topple civilization over the precipice into chaos.

Strangely enough, or maybe it is not strange, God warned us that that was what we were to fear as the days of the world's life began to draw to a close. It might be good to look at some of those verses just to bring home to our own hearts that our Creator foresaw this and it is something to be feared. II Peter 2:1: "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their licentiousness (lawlessness), and because of them the way of truth will be reviled. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words; from of old their condemnation has not been idle, and their destruction has not been asleep." Then verse 9: "Then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trial, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority. Bold and wilful, they are not afraid to revile the glorious ones, whereas angels, though great in might and power, do not pronounce a reviling judgment upon them before the Lord. But these, like irrational animals, creatures of instinct born to be caught and killed, reviling in matters of which they are ignorant,

will be destroyed in the same destruction with them, suffering wrong for their wrongdoing. They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their dissipation, carousing with you. They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children! Forsaking the right way they have gone astray; they have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, but was rebuked for his own transgression; a dumb ass spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness. These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm." (We feel that so often with those dear, masked, faceless people -- they are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm.) "For them the nether gloom of darkness has been reserved. For, uttering loud boasts of folly, they entice with licentious passions of the flesh men who have barely escaped from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption; for whatever overcomes a man, to that he is enslaved. For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overpowered, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. It has happened to them according to the true proverb, The dog turns back to his own vomit, and the sow is washed only to wallow in the mire."

Of course, many of them have been like those in our own society who have been among the most privileged and have heard the truth and rebelled against it. I think that is what makes us afraid when somebody says, "America is becoming ungovernable." We see that these signs of lawlessness, rulelessness and anarchy are present in our own society. We see the desire for everybody to do "what is right in their own eyes", however it affects anybody else. Then we see at the other side that dreadful, terrifying sight in California -- a silent citizenry whose children can look upon the dead body of a fourteen-year-old raped girl and say nothing to anybody about it for weeks! It is interesting that the desire to have our own way produces the silence that we think will protect our own way. I think that is why we fear.

Don't you think there is something else we fear even worse than the anarchy? Because there is a sense of order and a desire for order in all of us, we actually think that we will eventually choose something worse than anarchy in order to save us from chaos. Francis Schaeffer said that as the world drew to a close humanity would have to choose between chaos and totalitarianism. Don't you feel that even now when there is a blackout in Boston or a trade war in commodities that are essential to our livelihood? Don't you sense at times a kind of desire inside us to solve it however we solve it? Loved ones, God said there will arrive a great anti-Christ figure who will undertake to impose order on our international relationships and world trade if we will submit our wills utterly to him. As the world draws to a close that figure will manifest himself and the only thing that will eventually save us from him will be the return of Jesus in physical form to defeat him, but only after that anti-Christ figure will have destroyed millions of us and slaughtered millions of our children.

There is one gift that stands between us and that moment. There is one gift that stands between us and either anarchy or totalitarianism. It is the gift of leadership. That is the gift that we are studying this morning. Let's look at it and talk about it together. Romans 12:8: "He who exhorts, in his exhortation" -- and we have talked about that. "He who contributes, in liberality", and then the last one, which we did last week, "He who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness." Then the one before it: "he who gives aid, with zeal." I looked at that and thought, "He who gives aid" is pretty close to "he who does acts of mercy". I cannot explain where they got "give aid". I looked at the

manuscripts and I still don't know how they got that. But if you look at the King James Version the translation is the right one. It is not "he who gives aid" but "he who ruleth". And the Greek word is the participle "proistamenos". "Pro" is "in front of" and "istemianos" is "standing". It means "he who stands in front", he who takes the lead, he who has authority or he who leads. That is the gift from God -- the gift of leadership. And he who leads should lead with zeal.

Now loved ones, it is the same word in I Timothy 3:4. "He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way." "Manage" is the same word "proistemi". "For if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how can he care for God's church?" The gift of leadership refers to every dad and mom here in this room. It refers to an older brother or sister here and the senior roommates, because they have a responsibility. Those of you who were first in the apartment, first in the dormitory room, are in a position of leadership there. So it refers to all of us who are in positions of leadership inside our families.

Now it is also the word that is used in I Thessalonians 5:12, so it is a little broader than simply fathers and mothers or older brothers or sisters. "But we beseech you, brethren, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord"--and "over you in the Lord" is the same sense -- those who lead you in the Lord -- "and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves." So that would be family group leaders, Sunday school teachers, those of you who lead classes and seminars, the director of the choir and those of you who head up different groups of us who do different things in Jesus' ministry. Those of you who are in other bodies who have that kind of position, it would involve elders, and pastors and any of us who lead Bible study groups or prayer times. Probably the truth is, most of us in this room, even if we don't habitually do those things, occasionally find ourselves in a position where we are taking the lead and guiding somebody else inside Jesus' body.

It goes even beyond that. Look at Romans 13:1: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of him who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good." So it would refer to those of us who are leaders in the secular business world. It would refer to those of you who are foremen, those of you who head up offices. It would refer even to those of us who are the senior secretary or the senior worker in a small shop. It refers to all of us who are in positions of authority in secular business as well as those who are leaders politically. We are talking about leadership as it applies to all of us, not only in Jesus' body, not only in our families, not only in our business world, but also in our political world.

Why does God call it the gift of leadership? Remember he is talking about gifts -- there is the gift of exhortation, the gift of teaching, the gift of leadership. Why does he call it the gift of leadership? I know this is not popular, and I know it will be a shock to you and me, but God calls it a gift because leadership, true leadership, is not based on the things that the world bases its leadership upon. The world bases its leadership on the superiority of your skill or your prowess or your knowledge. Isn't that right? We tend to say, "This person has a skill greater than the rest; this person has more prowess than the rest; this person has more knowledge than the rest, so we will make him a leader." If you follow that principle through you end up with that famous Parkinson's Law, where you promote each guy and each girl to the level where you can promote them no longer because they don't do well enough at that level, and then they stay there at that level of incompetence. One of the reasons we have such chaos in our leadership these days is because we base

our leadership on superiority or skill or prowess or knowledge, not on the fact that leadership is actually a gift. God gives the gift of leadership.

That is, God's plan for leadership is one that He expressed when he was choosing a king for Israel. He sent Samuel to Jesse's family and Jesse paraded past him all the ones that you and I would make leaders -- all the senior sons, all the strong ones. The little guy who was playing his guitar out with the sheep, he didn't even bother about him. Jesse didn't even bring him in. But then Samuel said, "Have you no other sons?" and then they go out and bring this little guitar player in -- David -- and God chooses him and makes him king over Israel. God determines that certain of us will be leaders, not because we are better than everybody else, not because we are more skillful than everybody else, not because we are more knowledgeable than anybody else.

You are probably better in many ways than your foreman, you are probably better in many ways even than your dad or your mother, you are maybe better in many ways than your professor, you are maybe better in many ways than your boss, better in many ways than your family group leader or the person who leads your Bible study. You are better in many ways than I am, you are better in many ways than the elders, but that doesn't matter. Leadership is a gift that God gives by choosing certain ones of us at different times and it is a modifiable thing. Some of us are leaders in certain situations, some of us are leaders in other situations. There are times when we go down to decorate the downstairs and certain ones of us lead at that time. We won't lead when it comes to singing, we won't lead when it comes to praying or something else, but we lead at that moment. God chooses certain ones of us as leaders and that is the basis of leadership.

The miracle is not that he chooses the leaders. He puts them together with people who will listen to them. That is it! That is the miracle! That is the miracle here among us, do you know that? You may think different things about me -- some good, some bad -- but I'm not the miracle and actually you aren't the miracle. You and I are the miracle. Do you realize how long I preached some of this to six people in a little church in Donegal in Ireland? Yes, that is the miracle. The miracle is that God chose and appointed you to listen to me and appointed me to speak to you, and we submitted to that. At the end of the 1960's when things were chaos, God created our family here. The gift of leadership is God deciding that certain people will lead and certain people will listen to those leaders and that is how he graciously and miraculously creates order in a world that is sliding down the hill into anarchy. The only thing that stands between us and the chaos that will bring forth the anti-Christ figure is leadership. God continuing to choose certain leaders and continuing to choose certain people to follow and listen to them at certain times.

Now what will destroy that? It is interesting -- as it is in our hands. What will destroy that and what will plunge us into the chaos that will bring forth the anti-Christ figure is the rejection of the fact that leadership is a gift. The rejection either by those who follow, which will result in anarchy, or the rejection that leadership is a gift by those who lead, which will result in totalitarianism. How can those of us who follow reject the idea that leadership is a gift? It is easy. We can determine that Reagan is the president because he is supposed to know better than the rest of us. That is not God's basis of leadership. But if we reject the idea that leadership is a gift and follow the principle that he is a leader because he knows better than the rest of us, or he is supposed to know better than the rest of us, then all of us get into the act of trying to show that he is stupid and that he is not better than the rest of us and that we know better than him.

So, political debate which is essential for a healthy democratic society deteriorates into constant attempts to undermine the authority of the leader by proving that he doesn't eat the right cereal

for breakfast or that his wife refurbishes the White House too often or that maybe he is getting old or that maybe his policies won't work. Healthy debate often deteriorates into this attempt at blood-letting, a primitive desire to make the leader fight like a bear or a lion every day for his position. Loved ones, as we do that we gradually undermine, not Reagan, but we undermine leadership. We undermine the gift of leadership.

We do the same with our bosses. It is what brings instability so often to our large corporations; it is what gives the executives ulcers. It is not their job; it is the guys underneath digging the rock away to get them to drop. It is the thing that creates chaos in our churches. We won't accept that the pastor is a gift from God. We continue to think, "He is only the pastor because he knows better and he can outthink us at this moment, but we are working hard at it and we will soon overtake him." We don't agree with the guy, so we go elsewhere. There is little respect or stability of authority in our world. Church is a supermarket. You go along and pick this one for a while, and then he says something you don't like, so you go on to the next one. So there is no authority in our world, and there is no authority in our children's lives because we ourselves are doing what is right in our own eyes.

What is our plea? Our plea is, "It will save us from Hoover, from another chaotic president" or "It will save us from another Jim Jones." Actually, the truth is the election will save us from a Hoover. The truth is the obvious contradiction of the man's life by the Word of God will save us from a Jim Jones [a cult leader]. Those are bluff pleas. The truth is that leadership is a gift that God gives us that is precious and is the only thing that will stand between us and chaos. We do not need to agree with the leader in every detail; we do not need to agree with everything he does, but we do need to sense that God has planned for this man to be our president at this time and he is due our respect and trust. God has planned at this time that this man will be my pastor and he deserves our respect and our submission. God has designed that this person will head up my Bible study, and so I submit to him as leader. It is a gift.

Now what is the other thing that will destroy leadership? Rejection by the leaders of the fact that it is a gift. The beginnings of a sneaking suspicion that I lead because I am good enough to lead; the beginnings of a suspicion that I lead because I'm better than everybody else; the beginnings of the thought in your mind that you are in a position as boss or president or foreman or senior partner or elder brother or father or mother because you are good enough for it or because of your prowess or your skill. That is when you will begin to slip into totalitarianism. That is why God says, "He who leads, let him lead with zeal." The Greek word is "spoude" and it means "let him lead with diligence".

Let him lead with a due sense that it is a privileged position that he has. This is a sacred gift. He has been given dear children and a wife and he is a leader to them, and that is a sacred trust that God has given him. It is a sacred trust that God is giving you in your work. He has given you some people who, because of God, regard you as their leader. You don't deserve that position. It is a great privilege to have anybody who will trust you at all. God expects us to lead with diligence, duly considering the great privilege that we have, remembering that there is only one shepherd who runs when the wolf comes, and that is the hireling shepherd. The true shepherd never runs; he stays there in season and out of season because that gift of leadership is a sacred trust. It is a gift from God to you who lead. Therefore you are to lead with diligence.

Another meaning of the word is "with promptness, with speed, with haste, with despatch." So we are to lead with haste and despatch and promptness. Why? You submit those who follow you to unbearable

frustration when you fail to act as a leader. You create temptation and tension of all kinds in your children, your younger brothers and sisters, your family, the roommate who depends on you to lead in the house or the members of your house if you are a house leader, the people in your office if you head up an office, or the people in your Bible study group or family group if you head up a group in the body of Jesus. You commit the loved ones who trust you to insufferable tension and frustration if you fail to act and lead promptly. You are to lead with promptness and vigor.

I think we all loved Jimmy Carter [American President]; we thought he was a dear guy. We just were worn out because he didn't seem to do anything definite. There was a tremendous frustration over the country. We felt, "If we could only get up and go we can do something." We all felt, rightly or wrongly, that the resolution of the Iranian crisis came when Reagan got in and Iran saw that we were going to do something. Loved ones, that is a picture of what happens in your family or your study group or your church or office when you fail to lead with "spoude" -- with promptness, haste, despatch, or diligence.

Another reason is that it is a misconception on your part what the job of a leader is when you fail to lead with haste and promptness. In other words, when they were walking around the walls of Jericho, what if Joshua had not commanded them to do what God had told them to do and had started to think, "Now, that won't work, obviously. I have to do something to get these walls down. They look pretty strong. I'll walk around them a couple of times." If he had done that, you know he would have been misconceiving the basis of his leadership. He would have thought, "I've to lead here by working things out and achieving with my own skill what God wants me to achieve." In actual fact, his only job was to announce what God was going to do.

That may amaze you, but usually that is what we leaders have to do. Usually God puts us in a position and says, "You are to declare 'This is the way we are going!' and I'll take care of the rest." You are to launch out with joyful faith into the deep, not considering whether your net will hold the weight of fish that you will catch, not considering whether there will be a catch. Your job is to do what God tells you to do at the time without allowing your worry about your own incompetence to have anything to do with your action. Because the basis of leadership is timing. Do you know that? It is God that does that. He allows you and me to turn a few screws and bolt on a few nuts to make us feel we are co-workers with him, but he actually does the thing. When God gives a leader direction, the leader ought to announce that direction and get going. That is his job. You act with promptness and with despatch as leaders because all you have is the Holy Spirit's directives.

Let me ask you this. Do you think he wastes his time telling you what to do weeks before you have to do it? Do you think he lines us up in long queues and says, "John is going to do this in a couple of weeks' time so I'll give him a little forewarning"? He doesn't! The Holy Spirit doesn't waste his time like that. When the Holy Spirit tells you to do something, that is the time to do it. That is why he told you at that moment. If He had wanted you to do it three weeks hence He would tell you three weeks hence. Leaders, once you sense that God wants you to do something, get going and do it!

Another reason for acting with despatch is that a leader has to act without any self-pity. You husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, bosses, Bible study leaders and class teachers, the only way to lead is to lead independent of your own self and your own comfort. In other words, finally we are like the Great Leader, Jesus, who led; the Man for others. John Bunyan, who wrote "Pilgrim's Progress", had a good phrase when they were after his life. Somebody said, "What will you do if they get you?" and he said, "I will leap into the darkness of death by blind faith, come heaven, come

hell." That is so good. "I will leap into the darkness of death by blind faith, come heaven, come hell."

Loved ones, that is the only way to lead. Lead with promptness and despatch and yet with diligence and with an appreciation that all of us who lead and all of us who follow are involved in a miracle of God that will alone preserve us from the chaos that will eventually overwhelm the world. I pray for each one of you who are leaders, that you will lead and will respect leadership, and that in that way you will allow God to maintain the only order that will prevent hell breaking out among us.

Let us pray.

Dear Father, we thank you for your dear Word and your perfect will. We thank you for the gift of leadership. We thank you, dear Lord, that you take poor creatures such as ourselves and you use some of us to lead and appoint some of us to follow. Lord, we see how dependent the leader is on the people he leads and how dependent the lead are on the leader. So, Lord, we thank you for the miracle. We thank you for this dear gift.

We commit ourselves to exercising it with diligence, promptness and despatch that all of us may grow more like Jesus every day.

Now the grace of our Lord Jesus, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us throughout this week. Amen.