

“Power & Position: So Much Dust in the Wind”

A sermon by Pastor Steve Easterday-McPadden
for First UMC, Grand Junction, Sunday, March 15, 2020

This sermon can be listened to on the FUMCGJ
website: www.fumcgj.org/media/

Scripture Text – Mark 10:35-45 [NLT]

OPENING

I found a great many engaging quotes on power, position, and leadership online. Let me share a few of those with you that engage the worship theme this morning to get you into the mindset of the message.

“Power does not corrupt...[people]; fools, however, if they get into a position of power, corrupt power.”

[George Bernard Shaw](#) (Nobel Laureate for Literature, 1925, and Academy Award Winner, 1939, for Best Adapted Screenplay for *Pygmalion*, which was nominated for Best Picture and whose leading roles won nominations for Best Actor and Best Actress.)

Writing 150 years earlier, John Adams, the 2nd President of the United States, could well have provided George Bernard Shaw with this as background for Shaw’s observations: “Because power corrupts, society’s demands for moral authority and character increase as the importance of the position increases.”

[John Adams](#) (2nd U.S. President)

“Nearly...[everyone] can stand adversity, but if you want to test...[someone’s] character, give...[them] power.”

[Abraham Lincoln](#) (16th U.S. President)

“The only thing more dangerous than ignorance is arrogance.”

[Albert Einstein](#)

“The problem of power is how to achieve its responsible use rather than its irresponsible and indulgent use; ~~of how to get men of power to live for the public rather than off the public.~~”

[John F. Kennedy](#) (35th U.S. President)

These last two intersect directly with Jesus’ admonition of His ambitious disciples, James and John:

“We are reminded that, in the fleeting time we have on this Earth, what matters is not wealth, or status, or power, or fame, but rather how well we have loved and what small part we have played in making the lives of other people better.”

[Barack Obama](#) (44th U.S. President)

Relationships are never about power, and one way to avoid the will to hold power over another is to choose to limit oneself, i.e., to serve. Humans often do this –

- in touching the infirm and sick,
- in serving the ones whose minds have left to wander,
- in relation to the poor,

- in loving the very old and the very young,
- or even in caring for others who have assumed a position of power over them.

[William P. Young](#) (author of *The Shack*)

And as we just heard:

⁴² ...*Jesus called... [the Twelve] together and said, “You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. ⁴³ But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else.*

SERMON THOUGHTS

- Main Point: The contrast between self-serving narcissists and other-serving leaders. The two disciples, like so many today, were of the former category; Jesus the latter.

TO THE SCRIPTURES

(*Unpack the dynamics in the Scripture text for today with that main point as backdrop.*)

- So, in the context of our Lenten worship series, what is “dust in the wind”?
 - Power and position?
 - No, the exploitation of power and position for personal gain.

ILLUSTRATIONS

- Two great examples of quiet greatness:
 1. John Havlicek, Boston Celtics basketball player; 1962-1978, died just last April (4/25/2019) at the age of 79
<https://www.bostonglobe.com/sports/celtics/2019/04/27/john-havlicek-teammates-reminisce-about-his-quiet-greatness/VBd7wMmsmnAg0qTdw07U3N/story.html>
 2. Hedy Lamarr (w/ George Antheil, pianist/composer)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=329&v=5QypXkeEe_Q&feature=emb_title
 (***Yancey: Please play this from 2:44 to 3:52.** I’ll set it up and call for the start of the clip.*)

(*Source: World Economic Forum: Women Who’ve Changed (*the World That You’ve Probably Never Heard Of
https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/03/5-women-you've-never-heard-of-who-changed-the-world/**)

CONCLUSION

- Where do you (and I) fall on the continuum between what JFK named as the “responsible use” of power, that is, the use of power that Jesus affirmed, and what JFK named the “irresponsible and indulgent use” of power, that is, the use of power that Jesus condemned?
 - Another way to think about this is to ask how those we admire use power. In ways that Jesus would affirm or ways that He would condemn?

- Important guiding principle ALWAYS in this series:
 - The element of HOPE that life with Christ brings us in the midst of the reality of all the “dust in the wind” of our lives, even how we think about the proper use of power and position in the world.
- The season of Lent can be **a gift** to us if we take it seriously and use the space and time it offers us to take stock of that which is of eternal significance and, therefore, of greatest value to our lives now. Because, after all, why invest ourselves in that which is but “so much dust in the wind”?

Let's pray...