

Dear Class Member,

Jesus entered Jerusalem as the Son of David on Palm Sunday, offering a style of leadership very different from the style of the chief priests and the Roman leaders. Effective leadership has been important in response to the coronavirus pandemic, and we have seen a variety of examples across the political spectrum. Because of the urgency of the need, the topic of this lesson will be leadership.

During this time of physical separation forced on us all by efforts to control the spread of the virus, *The Wired Word* is including in the TWW student version the full lesson, with all the biblical commentary and additional discussion suggestions normally available only in the teacher's version.



Leaders Rise to the Challenge of COVID-19

The Wired Word for the Week of April 5, 2020

In the News

"One odd side effect of COVID-19 has been what it does to taste," reports *The Washington Post*. "Even those who have avoided the illness enjoy things they once disliked: government spending. Facetiming with family. Andrew M. Cuomo."

Although Cuomo had a reputation for being a micromanager and a bully, the Democratic governor of New York has been earning praise in the news media for his handling of the coronavirus pandemic. Cuomo offers morning news conferences that begin with facts: reports on the growth of cases from zero to 30,000 to 45,000 in New York state alone. "That's a problem," he says, along with the fact that they are running out of beds and ventilators. Then he tells moving stories about New York, his family, and the wider population. He acknowledges that the density of urban New York -- its "closeness," in his words -- is what makes it vulnerable, but is also what will help it to survive. The Cuomo news conferences have been described as "part briefing, part sermon, part inspirational talk."

On the Republican side of the aisle, Gov. Larry Hogan of Maryland has been applauded in the media for his leadership during this crisis. Early on, he delegated day-to-day governing authority to his lieutenant governor so that he could focus full time on the pandemic. "I think this has been a time where governors really have led," said Hogan to *CBS News*, "We've been on the front lines, and we've stepped up to make those tough decisions, governors on both sides of the aisle, but also to push for more action from the federal level." Hogan is a popular Republican in a predominantly Democratic state, and he also chairs the National Governors Association.

On *Fox News* last Sunday, Hogan said "We don't want people to be scared, but we do want them to take it seriously and want, you know, the facts to be out there. So we're going to follow the

doctors and the scientists." Hogan's comments were made as Maryland experienced a sharp rise in the number of people infected by the coronavirus, including 66 residents in one nursing home. On Monday, he put Maryland under a stay-at-home directive as coronavirus cases surpassed 1,400.

Historian Doris Kearns Goodwin, whose latest book is *Leadership in Turbulent Times*, tells *CBS News* that there is precedent for governors taking the lead in a time of crisis. "When I think about FDR and the situation in the Depression before he became president -- he's the governor of New York, and New York state was overwhelmed by the Depression -- so he started taking action on his own. [Roosevelt was] the first person in the nation, as a governor, to mobilize a comprehensive relief program." Throughout the country, many governors and local officials have led during this time. Responses have differed from place to place, often tailored to local conditions, but each has now been placed in a position where their leadership has immediate meaning.

In an article on "Leadership in the Time of the Coronavirus," Steve Denning reports on efforts to "bend the curve" through social distancing. He quotes Michael Osterholm, Director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota, who warns that this approach will not defeat the disease. "The virus is likely to be here until we have a vaccine," Osterholm said. "When we are 'bending the curve,' all we are doing is postponing those cases; we are not eliminating them. The challenge is how many cases we can suppress or prevent until we get a vaccine. I hear talk of being in this until April or August, but I think we are going to be in this for many, many months."

On March 29, President Trump announced that federal social-distancing guidelines would be extended to April 30 in an effort to curb the coronavirus outbreak. The initial 15-day period of social distancing urged by the federal government was set to expire on Monday, March 30. But "nothing would be worse than declaring victory before the victory is won," Trump said outside the White House, in a briefing reported by the *New York Post*. As of March 29, the United States has more than 130,000 cases of COVID-19 and at least 2,300 deaths -- and the death toll is expected to peak around Easter, April 12. Trump had previously aimed to reopen the country on Easter, but said Sunday that was "just an aspiration."

With regard to mitigation methods designed to decrease the number of infections and deaths, Trump said, "I want the American people to know that your selfless, inspiring and valiant efforts are saving countless lives. You are making the difference."

Although many people have criticized President Trump's leadership in the face of this pandemic, on March 25, the director-general of the World Health Organization praised Trump's "political commitment" to preventing the spread of coronavirus as the global community works to "suppress and control" the pandemic. According to the *New York Post*, WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the crisis needed "leadership."

More on this story can be found at these links:

[Andrew Cuomo During the COVID-19 Crisis Is the Same as Ever, With One Big Difference: People Like Him. *The Washington Post*](#)

[Trump Extends Coronavirus Social-Distancing Guidelines to April 30. *New York Post*](#)
[Leadership in Times of Crisis. *CBS News*](#)

[Maryland Gov. Hogan Says He's Listening to Scientists, Not Trump, When it Comes to Coronavirus. *Fox News*](#)

[Leadership in the Time of the Coronavirus. *Forbes*](#)

[WHO Chief Praises Trump's Coronavirus 'Leadership.' *New York Post*](#)

Applying the News Story

Palm Sunday, when Jesus entered Jerusalem as the Son of David, is an appropriate day to focus on the qualities of effective leadership, especially during the coronavirus pandemic.

The Big Questions

1. What is the advantage of being a front-line leader in politics and in the church? What qualities should such a leader have?
2. Gov. Cuomo offers news conferences that are "part briefing, part sermon, part inspirational talk." How are people helped by talks that are a combination of facts and personal stories?
3. How can people be given encouragement and strength to face a long-term crisis such as the coronavirus pandemic? What spiritual resources can be used?
4. What lay and clergy leadership is being offered in your church during this crisis? What else could be done?
5. On the state and national level, where have you seen recent leadership that inspired you? Leadership that discouraged or disappointed you?

Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

1 Samuel 17:32

David said to Saul, "Let no one's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." (For context, read 17:1-51.)

David was still a young shepherd when he faced a champion of the Philistines, a giant named Goliath. Although the Israelites "fled from him and were very much afraid" (v. 24), David had the courage to step forward and fight the giant. He also understood the facts of the situation, and used the best tools he had to win a victory: He "chose five smooth stones from the wadi, and put them in his shepherd's bag, in the pouch; his sling was in his hand, and he drew near to the Philistine" (v. 40). With great skill, he slung a stone, hit Goliath in the forehead, and knocked him down. Then he cut off his head with the giant's own sword.

Questions: What sort of courage do our leaders of church and state need to show at this time? What facts do we need to understand and accept? Where are the special skills needed to defeat the coronavirus?

Proverbs 27:23-24

Know well the condition of your flocks, and give attention to your herds; for riches do not last forever, nor a crown for all generations. (No context needed.)

The book of Proverbs is a collection of wise sayings about what makes for a good life. This set of verses calls for leaders to pay attention to the condition of the flocks under their care, and to be protective and compassionate toward them. Proverbs also reminds them that virtuous action should be seen as a thing of value, since riches and authority do not last forever.

Questions: How should leaders be showing protection and compassion toward their "flocks" in this time of crisis? Where do you see a focus on the common good, and where do you see attention being given to riches and authority?

Matthew 21:5

Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey. (For context, read 21:1-11.)

Before entering Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, Jesus sent two disciples ahead of him to find him a donkey. He trusted his disciples to do this advance work for him, and to prepare the people for his arrival. Jesus then entered the city in fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah, "humble, and mounted on a donkey." His humility stood in stark contrast to the arrogance of the religious leaders and civic leaders of Jerusalem. The people responded by shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!" (v. 9). They saw him as a leader with power that was both political ("Son of David") and spiritual ("in the name of the Lord").

Questions: What role did humility play in the effectiveness of Jesus as a leader? How can such a quality help leaders today? Why was it important for Jesus to focus on spiritual authority instead of political authority?

Philippians 2:3-4

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. (For context, read 2:1-11.)

The apostle Paul encourages the Philippians to imitate Christ's humility and to look first to the interests of others. He reminds them that Christ Jesus was "in the form of God," but he "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave" (vv. 6-7). In the end, this self-emptying did not diminish Christ, but God "highly exalted him" (v. 9).

Questions: What would it mean for leaders today to imitate Christ's humility and look first to the interests of others? How can they practice servant leadership in the face of the coronavirus threat? What exaltation might result from such self-emptying?

For Further Discussion

1. According to [The New York Times](#), Guillermo Maldonado, pastor of a Miami megachurch, urged his congregants on March 15 to show up for worship services in person. "Do you believe God would bring his people to his house to be contagious with the virus? Of course not," he said. Rodney Howard-Browne of The River at Tampa Bay Church in Florida insisted he would only shutter the doors to his packed church "when the rapture is taking place" (Howard-Browne was arrested on Monday for endangering lives). What is the danger of such statements to church members and the broader public?
2. New Testament professor [N.T. Wright says](#), "the coronavirus-induced limitations on life have arrived at the same time as Lent, the traditional season of doing without. But the sharp new regulations -- no theater, schools shutting, virtual house arrest for us over-70s -- make a mockery of our little Lenten disciplines. Doing without whiskey, or chocolate, is child's play compared with not seeing friends or grandchildren, or going to the pub, the library or church. There is a reason we normally try to meet in the flesh. There is a reason solitary confinement is such a severe punishment. And this Lent has no fixed Easter to look forward to. We can't tick off the days. This is a stillness, not of rest, but of poised, anxious sorrow." How are you coping with this time of "anxious sorrow"?
3. "Our civil rights laws protect the equal dignity of every human life from ruthless utilitarianism," Roger Severino, director of the U.S. Civil Rights Office, [said in a news release](#). "Persons with disabilities, with limited English skills and older persons should not be put at the end of the line for health care during emergencies." He was speaking in response to concern that states would allow medical providers to discriminate on the basis of disabilities, race, age or certain other factors when deciding who would receive lifesaving medical care during the coronavirus pandemic. The Department of Homeland Security made this very clear, declaring this past Saturday that "persons with disabilities should not be denied medical care on the basis of stereotypes, assessments of quality of life, or judgments about a person's relative 'worth' based on the presence or absence of disabilities." What is the role of Christian leaders in addressing such issues?
4. [Religion News Service](#) reports that many churches have rushed to embrace "virtual" Communion: "Some celebrate via livestream; others encourage parishioners to bring their own bread to Zoom videoconference meetings; and at least one United Church of Christ minister is upping the frequency of his online Communion because 'our people need normalcy.'" Will leaders of your congregation offer online Communion on Maundy Thursday this week? What are the advantages and disadvantages of such an offering?
5. How can you be a leader in your family, neighborhood, church or community during this coronavirus pandemic? What kind of leadership will you offer today?

Responding to the News

Find a way to take a leadership role in this time of pandemic, one that is grounded in courage, compassion, humility, facts and faith.

Prayer

Almighty God, give us strength to be effective leaders in this time of health crisis, and send your Spirit on those in church and government who have the power to heal us and help us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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