

Servant Leadership

September 30, 2018

9:15 a.m. – Mount Pleasant, 11 W. 10th Avenue

10:15 a.m. – East Vancouver, 4015 Fraser

11:15 a.m. – Mount Pleasant, 11 W. 10th Avenue

6:00 p.m. – Mount Pleasant, 11 W. 10th Avenue

- Thank you, Ken, and all of you for inviting me to speak at your services today. **I was asked to talk about servant leadership.**
- I certainly didn't start out imagining that one day I would be called to be a leader. I became an academic because of my natural curiosity and passion for science. That passion and curiosity led me to an academic career in medicine and biology.

- My research encompasses the immune system, eye inflammation and age-related macular degeneration – a leading cause of blindness.
- As I progressed in my academic career, I also began to assume administrative and leadership responsibilities, first at Emory University and then at University of Cincinnati and now at the University of British Columbia.

- I believe that a leader has to start from a position of humility and respect. There are all kinds of people who you work with or encounter as a university president. My style is to consider myself as their servant.
- Servant-leadership doesn't mean that you don't, at times, have to make tough decisions or assert yourself, but the foundation of how I interact with people is one of mutual respect.

- Part of how I reach out to the least-powerful individuals in an organization or society comes from remembering what it feels like to be undervalued. The other part comes from my faith. I'm a Christian and have been very involved in churches in the different cities that I've lived in.
- As Jesus says in Mark 10:45: “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

- And again, in Luke 22:25-26: “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves.”

- But what does servant leadership mean for Christians?

- First, a servant leader seeks the glory of God;

- Second, a servant leader seeks the best for the people he or she serves;
- Third, a servant leader is not preoccupied with personal recognition or fame;
- Fourth, a servant leader anticipates and graciously yields to a new generation of leaders, when the time comes.
- Jesus is the model for servant leadership.

He submitted his own life to sacrificial service under the will of God, and freely out

of service for others. He came to serve, even though, as God's son, he was more powerful than any other leader in the world.

- In John 13:1-17, he gives a practical example of what it means to serve others, when he washes the feet of his followers. By so doing, he sets an example for his followers, and for all of us.
- From his teachings, we learn that a servant leader is one who:

- Is Christ-centered in all aspects of life
- Committed to serve the needs of others
- Has the courage to lead with both
power and love
- Works to nurture others as servant
leaders
- And is always inviting feedback from
those they want to serve, in order to
follow the example of the ultimate
servant leader, Jesus Christ.

- As a university president, of course, my service has to be agnostic of denomination or faith. But I still strive to act according to the above principles.
- It's really about my responsibility for others and focusing on them.
- And so it's entirely consistent with my own faith that I can be supportive of all faith groups, and also of students who are still searching or have decided that there is no room for faith in their lives. I still need to

serve them, regardless of what their beliefs or interests might be.

- At UBC, there are about two dozen student clubs that have a faith affiliation. I don't focus so much on the similarities and distinctions of the particulars of different religions. I focus more on the fact that for individuals that do have a faith, it's an important part of their identity. It's an important part of their wellness.

- For that reason, at a secular university, I can be supportive of very different kinds of people with different faiths and different beliefs, understanding that for each different group of people there are different ways that are necessary to support them and for their wellness.
- When I was a graduate student in Montreal, I was very focused on my research and my studies. And I took it hard when that research didn't go the way I hoped.

- But I was fortunate to have a pastor at my Sunday school who reminded me not to take myself too seriously. That advice has helped keep me balanced and focussed and whenever I get stressed, I try to remember it.
- I often remind students not to take themselves too seriously and to look after themselves. Doing well on exams is important, but being healthy – mentally and physically – is also important.

- I'd like to give a bit of insight into my own faith journey, which, as you will see, is also a personal exploration of science and faith.
- It certainly isn't a remarkable journey in any way, shape, or form. In many ways, it wasn't meant to be. I think I owe it to God that I was able to find Jesus and I will tell you how that came about.
- I was born in Vancouver in 1962, some years after my father and mother had emigrated from Japan to North America. At

the time, my father was a professor of Mathematics at UBC, along with the amazing future President of UBC, Professor Walter Gage, who was also a member of that department. Some of you may remember him at UBC.

- My mother and father were not believers and did not practice any religion. From kindergarten through 12th grade, despite growing up in predominantly white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant neighbourhoods, in

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Baltimore after leaving Vancouver as a toddler, I had very little concept of what happened in churches.

- I walked past them going to school, drove past them on the way to different places, learned how to play musical instruments, but I didn't really know what happened inside churches.
- The only times we, as a family, would enter churches would be to listen to music. My

father loves music, and we would go there on Christmas Eve, or to hear someone play in a church, just because that's where the concert happened to be.

- I didn't think the pews were very comfortable, but I was curious about what actually happened on Sundays, and on evenings and afternoons. These churches were really nodes of activity, places where people built community.

- In some ways, I was jealous of not being part of that mysterious activity happening in churches. But I thought that churches were community social clubs where people gathered on Sunday for coffee, and where my friends attended Boy Scouts group meetings.
- My first introduction to God and Jesus occurred in my freshman year, as a student at the University of Chicago. With the sudden freedom of living far away from

home, and with no parental guidance, I slipped into a trap that perhaps some of you did as well.

- I partied hard and frequently drank too much on Friday nights and weekends.

Indeed, I think that part of my binge drinking had to do with a deep dissatisfaction with my life deep inside my soul—maybe a lack of a reference point, a lack of a spiritual anchor. However, I didn't know it at the time.

- There was one particularly risky evening, when I had had far too much to drink, and was hanging from an open windowsill on the 5th floor of my residence hall, on a very cold night in Chicago.
- I don't remember much about that evening other than that two of my friends rescued me from the windowsill and helped me get into bed. It was a very difficult night and they stayed by my side the entire time to ensure that I made it through. I am sure

that many of you have some friends to whom you owe your lives.

- These two friends were very active in church on campus and started to take me with them to church services. We went to Bond chapel, a Catholic chapel, and to Rockefeller Church, the large church on the University of Chicago campus. They took me to Inter-Varsity groups, both large and small.

- They also took me back home to their suburbs to attend their churches, to meet with their ministers and mingle with their home congregations. In particular, they took me to their families for some family love, because they thought that I was lost.
- I remember feeling very special when I entered these churches. I felt chills down my spine as I knelt down to pray, not understanding what that meant. Although I had virtually no knowledge of the Bible,

there was something about simply being in those churches that moved me as I had never been moved before.

- After graduating from the University of Chicago, I made my way back to Canada to be a graduate student in Experimental Medicine at McGill University. My girlfriend from Chicago was meant to join me in Montreal but she never ended up doing so, and I quickly spiraled into a deep

depression. I began drinking again, heavily, and had suicidal thoughts.

- Fortunately, I encountered a fellow graduate student working in the Collaborator's Laboratory at the Royal Victoria Hospital. She played the piano. I played the cello. The pianist's name was Wendy Yip. Sometime later we would start dating, and eventually she became my wife.
- Wendy took me to her church. I was a doubtful, smart aleck non-believer when I

accompanied her to church, even though I had already these feelings, these chills down my back whenever I entered a church.

- We would spend hours talking about why I had problems believing in God and Jesus. I had been educated as a scientist, to look for proof, and I could see no proof of the existence of God or Jesus.
- After many conversations, and my attendance at a Sunday school with 11-

year-old kids, I started to understand the concept of faith, and the persuasiveness of the Bible and the power of those who believed, as evidence that there must be a God.

- A particular pastor, Lloyd Pierce, of Westmount Baptist Church, worked with me and my faith emerged and grew stronger day by day. I'll never forget the day I was baptized in Westmount Baptist Church, on a glorious, sunny Easter Day.

- Although my attendance at church would be variable, I became an even more committed Christian once my first daughter was born in Boston, Massachusetts.
- There was a pivotal moment when I was a Senior Vice-Provost for Academic Affairs at Emory University in Atlanta. Emory was originally a Methodist university but is now a secular, multi-faith university.
- I discussed the issue of faith with then-president of the university, Jim Wagner, and

also with a professor that I admired greatly,

Tom Flynn, a Catholic priest.

- President Wagner was relatively open about his faith (he is a Presbyterian) but he reminded me that, as a senior administrator, it was important for me to respect and support staff, faculty, and students of every faith, as well as those who had decided not to believe. He was an exemplary model of a Christian servant leader.

- Professor Flynn, on the other hand, was different. Although he was a Catholic priest, he was extremely discreet about letting people know about his faith. He encouraged me to hide my Christianity and to be, as he said, “a stealth Christian.” And this from a Catholic priest!
- After more than a year of considering the possible options, I made a decision not to be a “stealth Christian.” In fact, I decided to immerse myself in supporting students of

all faiths at Emery University. I continued this practice at the University of Cincinnati, and now at UBC.

- Since moving to UBC, I have maintained my approach in supporting faculty, students, and staff in whatever faith they might practice, and regardless of whether they are believers or not. I also do not hide my Christianity.
- For a large proportion of our campus community - whether faculty, staff,

students, or alumni - faith plays an important role in their identity and their wellness.

- And, therefore, it's important for me to respect each of those faiths. It's important for me to be supportive of their needs and to advocate for them with respect to their needs on a secular campus, to fulfill that part of their identity and their well being.
- There are multiple gifts that result from having a spiritual path. My own faith keeps

me anchored and keeps me focused on why I use my efforts to help individuals in the university community and beyond.

- In closing, I'd like to once more say how honoured I am to be here and how excited I am to share my faith with you. I think what I have learned in my journey is that God is everywhere, not only in my church and your church, not only here today, but God is everywhere.