

The Rev. Cornel Barnett, D.Min.
 Redwoods Presbyterian Church
 Larkspur, California
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 Psalm 40:1-11, John 1:29-40
 "Focused, Joyful and Responsible"

This past week I attended a clergy luncheon with Margaret Marcuson from Portland, Oregon, who spoke about leadership. I visited her website, Marcuson Leadership Circle, before the talk and read an article entitled, "Are You Too Focused." She cautions against a too narrow focus.

She maintains that widening our horizons benefits leadership. She writes: "I recently led a retreat in Hoquiam, Washington, on the Olympic Peninsula. Before I headed home, I asked how far we were from the ocean. 'About fifteen minutes,' someone said. I am not one to meander home; typically I drive straight through with minimal breaks. But I thought to myself, it's ridiculous to be this close to the beach and not go. I could feel the pull of the many things I had to do, but I made myself take the little trip. I didn't spend all afternoon there, but I did find that even a short glimpse of waves and sand, and especially the long ocean horizon, gave me a much-needed sense of perspective."

She continues: "Widening our perspective and taking a break are about more than stress relief. When we have some new experiences, we can begin to see our leadership context in a new light. And when our perspective is different, we lead differently, and others have the chance to respond to our wider view."

Margaret cautions leaders in the church against a too narrow focus, whatever those may be. She says that for her going out in nature, singing, reading fiction, and mixing with diverse people in her professional field gives her a broader focus. While Redwoods Presbyterian Church loves tradition it's – you all – are open to new ideas and suggestions.

I know that my reading, love of nature, mixing with diverse people, appreciation of all kinds of music, film and theater certainly helps me have a broader perspective in my preaching, teaching and ministry but for me as a pastor and for the leaders in the church – all who have a wonderful array of outside interests – there is one absolutely important ingredient for the best and broadest leadership perspective.

It is found in our *Book of Order* on what we do in the worship service when new officers are ordained and installed as we are doing today. It states: "The service of ordination and installation shall *focus upon Christ* and the joy and responsibility of serving him through the mission and ministry of the church, and shall include a sermon appropriate to the occasion." Margaret is not a Presbyterian so she didn't emphasize this aspect of leadership.

The best focus for leaders of the church and Christians anywhere is on Christ. An honest and open focus on Christ opens us to perspectives way beyond our individual focusing.

We might think that feeding the poor is important which it is and then we see Christians like Janet Stang in the Amazon forest standing for and dying for poor farmers whose land is threatened by wealthy cattle farmers.

We might feel the urgency to march with Martin Luther King Jr. against segregation in the south and racism in the north and south and then Christ calls us to engage in a conversation with our cousin who pickets on the other side. When I visit Indiana I am told that people don't discuss politics and religion. The best conversations I've had in Indiana with people diametrically opposed to me have been in politics and religion.

We might think that our ministry here at Redwoods is expansive, and it is wonderful, but Christ could be encouraging us to be more proactive and creative about sharing our faith with others and inviting them to worship.

The psalmist today has this kind of energy when he proclaims: "I have told the glad news of deliverance in the great congregation; see, I have not restrained my lips, as you know, O LORD. I have not hidden your saving help within my heart, I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation; I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness from the great congregation."

I must add that focusing on Christ can lead to a narrow perspective, like that of the Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, Arizona. They published a flier recently that claims that the shooting of both a House member and a federal judge -- the latter of whom was killed -- is God's punishment for judicial and Congressional action against the Westboro Baptist Church. "God sent the shooter to shoot you! And He's sitting in Heaven laughing at you!" the announcement reads.

The Westboro Baptist Church presumes that its perspective is God's perspective. The church is free to say what it wants but when the national and religious consensus is 99% in the other direction one sees how narrow they in fact are. It's sad. How does one dialogue with this group of people?

When Jesus calls his disciples to follow him as he does in our Gospel lesson today he is calling them to leadership as we discover later on in the Gospels and the Acts of Apostles. He teaches them with parables and open truths (like that of the Sermon of the Mount) and by example. The net is thrown wide and the disciples learn the message the best they can and later continue Christ's ministry with a resurrection message and the Holy Spirit.

The more we focus on Christ the greater and broader our focus becomes and when it comes in the form of service as it does for the leaders of our church we engage joyfully and responsibly. We know what joy and responsibility are so I won't elaborate.

Before we go to the ordination and installation service one final Margaret Marcuson perspective -- and this is a broad one. She said, and I'm intrigued with this, that Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech is one of the best speeches on leadership. I

encourage our leaders, and all of us, to read it and see why Margaret thinks it's that important. Just the title alone, "I Have a Dream," is good enough for any leadership.

We shall now proceed with the ordination and installation ceremony of our new officers. The ordination and installation questions are intended to focus church leadership in creative ways and to encourage joy and responsibility in service.

The clerk of the session Ani Lelea will join me in leading the ceremony.