

*Dorothy Leadership*  
Deuteronomy 34: 1-6; Matthew 16: 13-23  
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## **I. Introduction**

In both the book and the movie of the *Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy and her friends finally come face to face with the Oz the Great and Terrible, who is the one that they hope will make all their wishes come true. As it turns out, of course, Dorothy's dog, Toto pulls back the curtain to reveal a simple man from Nebraska who – like Dorothy – was carried to Oz accidentally and has been masquerading as a wizard for many years.

What makes Toto's pulling back the curtain a dramatic surprise is that the great mask head of Oz – with the smoke and fire and booming voice – fulfills everything that we were hoping and expecting that Oz would be. As the leader of this wondrous city, Oz is authoritative and decisive. He is all knowing and all powerful. He has all the answers and makes our wishes come true.

Except, of course, he can't. He's really none of those things; but he knows what the people of Oz (and us) are looking for in a leader, and he gives it to them. We all look for leaders who seem as though they know the answers, who can give us a sense of assurance in times of uncertainty, who convey and inspire confidence – leaders who can give us the things that we think we need.

In having Toto pull back the curtain, L. Frank Baum lets us know that the stereotypes that we associate with leadership, are not always what they're cracked up to be. The deep booming voice and the appearance of assuredness allow us to project the things we want onto leaders, who are often people very much more human than we like to admit.

In contrast, Frank Baum offers a very counter-intuitive picture of what leadership should look like: leadership that he embodies in a little girl from Kansas named Dorothy. Dorothy is a girl, she's young, and she's small – all things that in the year 1900, when The Wonderful Wizard of Oz was published, would have likely excluded Dorothy from leadership roles (in fact, in the later Oz books, it becomes clear that women hold all the power in Oz). We are spending the month of January looking at faith lessons from the *Wizard of Oz*, the book, the classic 1939 movie, the modern prequel, Wicked: the Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West and the musical *Wicked* that spun off of that book. We going to look this morning at four characteristics of leadership that Dorothy models for us.

## **II. Leadership in a Post-Modern World**

### **A. Authenticity**

One of my favorite pastor-authors is Brian McLaren, who was the long-time pastor of Cedar Ridge Community Church, up north of us here, in Spencerville, MD, and who now teaches,

writes, and consults. About a decade ago, Rev. McLaren wrote a wonderful little article for *Rev!* magazine called “Dorothy on Leadership,” exploring leadership in the post-modern world.

He begins the article by talking about how exciting *and depressing* it was for him to attend leadership seminars taught by some of the country’s most successful pastors: people like Bill Hybels from Willow Creek Church, or Rick Warren from Saddleback. They seemed larger than life and supremely confident in their approach to ministry.

Brian McLaren says that it felt a little like David must have felt when he went out to meet Goliath. In the story from 1 Samuel, King Saul agrees to let David go out and fight Goliath, but David is a young man at this point in the story, and when he puts on Saul’s armor, he can’t move. And he tells Saul, “I can’t walk in this,” and he takes it off, puts on his shepherd’s clothes, and goes out to find five smooth stones for his sling.

The first thing that we learn about leadership from Dorothy is the importance of *authenticity*. Dorothy is consummately her own person throughout this story of the *Wizard of Oz*. She never pretends to be anything other than she is, and as bizarre as her situation becomes, she remains that grounded, self-possessed little girl from Kansas. Likewise, King David can’t be Saul; he’s got to be David. His strength as a leader comes from his willingness to be himself and to let his leadership flow from that.

Authenticity is quickly recognizable and is a compelling force, although it is often not rewarded, particularly in leaders. Because we so often look to leaders to calm our own fears, it is disquieting to hear about *their* fears. In our Gospel lesson from this morning, Peter finally gives voice to the hopes and dreams that the disciples had been harboring and declares that Jesus is the messiah. But when Jesus starts to explain that being the messiah did not mean riding into Jerusalem in front of conquering armies, but instead involved dying an ignominious death on a cross, Peter doesn’t want to hear that.

But Jesus’ authenticity is evident throughout his ministry. You never see Jesus act one way in public and another in private. You never see him strategize about how something should be presented, or what kind of spin was important for the people to hear his message in the right way. He is who he is (which is, of course, the sacred name of God as well: YHWH, I Am who I Am.). It’s about authenticity.

### ***B. Questioning***

The second thing that we learn from Dorothy about leadership is that it has less to do with having the answers than it has to do with asking the right questions. Dorothy does not lead her little rag-tag band because she has the knowledge or expertise, she asks the questions. Right from the beginning of the story when she asks the good witch of the North how to get to the Emerald City, her questions frame the quest.

Last month, Maynard Moore worked with Wesley Seminary to pull together a wonderful symposium on the life and work of our own Bishop James Mathews and his brother Joe Mathews. Bishop Schol gave a talk the opening night in which he said, “The church is in decline

because it stopped asking the right questions, and started dispensing answers.” I think that he’s right, and you can see that – as Brian McLaren notes – even in our language. People who aren’t regular church folk, are called “Seekers” in the parlance of church growth. The unspoken message in that term is that they’re looking for answers that we (the “found”) have.

We should *all* be “seekers.” We never stop learning about God, right? We never have probed the entire depth of Holy Scripture. We never have probed the depth of our own character. If we’re not learning, we’re dead. Look in the Scriptures at how Jesus teaches: he asks questions and encourages reflection. “Who is my neighbor?” asks the lawyer, to which Jesus responds by telling the story of the good Samaritan. “Now who acted like a neighbor to the one who fell among the thieves,” he asks at the end. Answers, by definition, limit. Questions expand. Answers define; questions invite.

If any of you get the Lewis Center’s weekly e-mail, the last section is always called “Asking the right questions.” Right now, we’re in the process as a church of asking questions about what it means to be a cooperative parish. And we’ve uncovered a lot of good questions. We’ll be broadening that process of question asking on a retreat with the full Church Council in a couple of weeks. The role of a powerful leader is not to tell people what they should be doing, but to encourage, through questioning, people to explore their own answers for themselves.

### ***C. Journeying***

A third aspect of post-modern, Dorothy leadership is more about creating a quest than about getting to a goal. Dorothy – and Jesus – invite people on a journey of exploration. They don’t give people answers, they take them on a quest. In our passage from Deuteronomy this morning, we hear the story of the end of the life of Moses, who died before entering the Promised Land. Moses is the paradigm for the life of faith – he is the one to whom everyone aspires – and he spent his whole life leading the people to a land that he would never enter. What is the message there? I think that the message is that the journey is more important than the goal.

Dorothy doesn’t solve the problems of her friends, the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodman, or the Cowardly Lion. She invites them to trade in their old questions for a new quest. They are going to see the Wizard and what they find *along the way* is that they had the answers inside themselves the whole time. What does Jesus say whenever he meets someone who is receptive to his message? “Follow me.” The “where?” isn’t important. Just the “follow me.” We’re all going on a journey.

### ***D. Creating Leaders***

And it’s a journey of self-discovery, which brings us to the fourth and final aspect of Dorothy leadership: it’s ultimately about creating new leaders. As Dorothy and her friends move along their quest towards Oz, each of them grows and blossoms. They each take a hand in overcoming the obstacles they meet, and they each develop their own skills and confidence. In Baum’s book, the Scarecrow becomes the ruler of the Emerald City, and the Tin Woodman becomes the ruler of the land of the Winkies, and the Cowardly Lion becomes the King of the Forest. They all join the quest defined by what they lack, and they all end up as leaders.

Real leadership is not about having people follow you, but about creating other leaders. Real authority comes not from hoarding power, but from sharing it. Because when you share power through expanded leadership, you create more power. At the end of the Gospel of John, Jesus says to his disciples, “I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.” Jesus does not lead the world with a group of followers; he leaves them with a group of leaders who, transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit, move out to transform the world.

### **III. Conclusion**

Many of us carry around a model of leadership that grows out of our childhood and is modeled on our parents. Parents have all the answers (at least for a while!). They’re big and powerful, can solve any problem, and provide us with everything we need. And as we carry that image into adulthood, we can certainly find plenty of leaders who will promise those same things. The two-fold problem is that they really can’t, and in trying they leave us as children.

Dorothy and Jesus model a different kind of leadership. They are leaders who don’t pretend to be what they aren’t, but who act out of complete authenticity, comfortable with who they are. They are leaders who don’t give people pat answers, but challenge them with good questions. They are leaders who don’t focus on getting to the goal, but invite people to be part of a journey. They are leaders who don’t give people what they think they want, but that challenges them to develop the gifts that reside in them.

True leadership, after all, is not really ever about being powerful; but rather of channeling the power of God.

Amen.