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Today we get two examples of great leadership in our readings.

But first, what about Jesus' visit to his hometown? I have to touch on that. Did you ever go home for a high school reunion? What were your expectations? Maybe you wanted people to know how much you'd changed – how successful you had become. Maybe you wanted them to see how the ugly duckling you thought you were transformed into a swan!

One thing I remember from our St. Anthony Village High School 10 year reunion was the extraordinary transformation of Harley Walbon. Harley had always been a plucky little guy – and he still was. He was an average student, never had a girlfriend as far as anybody knew, didn't do sports or anything like that, but he had a lot of energy. He was a nice guy, always friendly.

Harley didn't go to college. I doubt that would have worked out for him. He went to work for his dad's trucking company and, ... well, well, well. In 10 years, Harley transformed the business. It was big and growing bigger. And there was Harley, with his lovely wife (no, not a trophy wife!) in a very nice suit, still a little guy, but now he was smoking a great big cigar!

And he was still Harley.

On some level, I think that must have been what it was like for Jesus to return to Nazareth, his hometown. He left as an adult who had apparently found his path in life. He was a carpenter – age 29 or 30. He had never shown any sign of being a learned man, no sign of being special in any way. Oh, there was the occasional odd story. He was found talking to Jerusalem's high priests as a boy. But that was because he got lost on the way home! (He was lucky he wasn't kidnapped and sold into slavery!) Wasn't there a story later on about water and wine or something at a wedding? But, everybody there was probably drunk anyway.

Then he disappeared from history! Nobody talked much about him. Apparently he left home and his career. Where did he go? A life of crime? Some shameful thing?

No! Worse! He showed up in his hometown synagogue and started talking like a rabbi! What was this!?! He was a charlatan! Where did he get this wisdom? He was probably just copying what he'd heard somebody else say! What were these tricks he was

doing? Healing? He's a carpenter! Who does he think he is? Better than us? He's an imposter!

This story is referenced in all the gospels. In Luke, the people of his hometown got so angry they tried to chase him off a cliff! But he simply walked away through them unseen. Of course. What better way to show that they couldn't see who he really was!

This is when we hear the famous words, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, among their own kin, and in their own house." It's important for us to remember that in the Bible a prophet was not necessarily someone who foretold the future. Occasionally that happened. But a prophet was known for being a truth-teller. That's why they were so unpopular! Nobody actually wants to hear the truth. And we *really* don't want to hear the truth from someone we *know*, someone who's just like us!

In the next few verses we hear about what an extraordinary leader Jesus was. Jesus gathered his disciples and he gave them the authority to cast out unclean spirits. He also gave them the power to cure the sick. Then he sent them out into the world.

Jesus delegated! Sure, he gave them instructions, but he trusted them to do the work he had given them to do. He delegated. *Just like he delegates to us.*

And Jesus' instructions for the disciples were specific and wise. He didn't want them to appear like the healers, the imposters wandering the countryside, taking advantage of people. He wanted their actions and appearance to identify them. Good marketing! Keep it simple! A staff, a pair of sandals, one robe with a belt – no money, no bread – no more. Travel in pairs. Don't move from house to house in a village. Stay where you are offered hospitality.

And the best advice yet! If people don't welcome you, if they just won't listen to you, don't take it personally! It's not about you. It's about the truth and their inability to hear the truth. Move on! Wipe their dust off your feet!

Our next great example of Christian leadership from our readings today is a highly accomplished Jew of humble beginnings. Paul was educated. He was a tentmaker who was a Roman citizen. He was upwardly mobile! Most valuable, Paul was smart and he shared his experiences in his letters.

Paul had to lead the churches he started from a distance. He *had* to delegate. Otherwise he couldn't travel and plant more churches! And what is clear from his writing is

that delegating did not come easily to him. He was a hands-on leader, inclined to believe that if it was going to be done well, it had to be done by him. Ahhhh, God teaches us our lessons. Paul had to learn to trust the leadership he had in place, including women in some churches (and *that* was a new wrinkle!) He didn't have a choice. God made the mission clear. Paul was the planter. Others tended the plants.

Paul's greatest gift was that he was totally honest, especially with himself. He wasn't afraid to share the process of his growth and development as a Christian. He didn't hide his shortcomings – his pride, his impatience, or his temper. (Remember, of all his traveling companions, no one ever went out with him twice!) He was a man of passion, and given our retrospective view, it's probably just as well that he couldn't be in charge of one congregation for a long period of time. Everybody probably would have burned out in a great glorious fizzle! I'd love to meet Paul, but I wouldn't want to live with him.

Paul's writing can be difficult. He overwrote! He kept repeating the same thing in different ways until we become utterly confused! There are those who attribute this to a rhetorical style of the time, but I don't know... His writing seems to be such a lively expression of his personality, his passion, his hopes, his fears... the subtext I hear loud and clear is, "I want to make sure you get this!"

And the irony for us, of course, is that in his second letter to the Corinthians, he referred to things that are confusing for us these days, like visiting "a third heaven." Jews traditionally believed in three heavens: the first our earthly level, the second, the planetary level, and the third, something beyond, where God dwells. Paul felt "exalted," as he puts it, by his relationship with God.

But then he realized that he couldn't live every day in an ecstatic state so God gave him a "thorn in his flesh," probably a physical affliction he had to live with to bring him back to earth. Nowadays, we don't know what he was referring to. Probably those who knew him did know. According to references in his letters, it may have been difficulty with his eyes, with malformed, very bow-legged legs, or perhaps epilepsy. Seizures were considered to be ecstatic experiences. Whatever affliction he had Paul saw it as a gift from God to keep him humble (not an easy task apparently).

I love Paul for his humanity, his honesty with himself, and his glorious, sometimes humorous passion. Some people have to be hit over the head to get the message. Paul had to be blinded in order to see. But he accepted it and understood it.

It is so easy to feel overwhelmed by what we believe God has called us to do. But God delegates to each of us. And here at Good Shepherd you all have demonstrated a wonderful ability to accept the several responsibilities that God has given to us. We can count on each other! We can share the load!

And if we ever feel overwhelmed, and I will confess that sometimes I do, just remember, God's grace is sufficient for us. We can take comfort that God can handle our weaknesses. As Paul taught us, our weaknesses belong to God too.