Canoeing the Mountains

Leading into Uncharted Territory
Tod Bolsinger, Ph.D.
“Leadership is disappointing your own people at a rate they can absorb.”

Ronald Heifetz
“Developing pastors into adaptive leaders.”
One Afternoon with the Maine Methodists...
“What can we do to keep our churches from dying?”
An Old Southern Pastor and “Church Growth” Strategies
“If western societies have become post-Christian mission fields, how can traditional churches become then missionary churches?”

Lesslie Newbigin
Lewis and Clark
August 12, 1805
What do we do when the landscape around us has changed so radically?
How do you “canoe” over mountains?
The Priest and the Jet Fighter Pilot
“At the moment of crisis, you will not rise to the occasion, you will default to your training.”
The “Miracle” on the Hudson
What do you do in default mode?

- Preaching ("Talking Longer")
- Programs ("Old Tricks")
- Personal Touch ("Trying harder")
We Presbyterians are so good at talking about problems that after awhile we think that we have actually done something.”

Morgan Murray, Pastor, Walnut Creek Presbyterian Church
What is the “nature” of our biggest challenges?

“Systemic problems with no clear answers.”
We were trained for a different context.

We were trained for rivers, not mountains.

We need to learn a new way of leading.
Ronald Heifetz

Leadership On the Line
Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading
Ronald A. Heifetz
Marty Linsky

Technical Problems vs.
Adaptive Challenges
Technical vs. Adaptive

- “Application of current knowledge, skills and tools to resolve a situation.”

- “Cannot be solved with one’s existing knowledge, skills and tools, requiring people to make a shift in values, expectations, attitudes or habits of behavior.”

- “Systemic problems with no clear answers.”
Identifying Adaptive Challenges

- A Cycle of Failure
- A Flight to Authority
- A Chorus of Complaints
- The Same Old Fight...
- The Result of Yesterday’s *Successes*.

*(sound familiar?)*
Four Types of Adaptive Challenges

- Gap between espoused values and behavior
- Competing commitments
- Speaking the unspeakable
- Work Avoidance
  - Distracting
  - Blaming
Identifying Adaptive Challenges

“Cannot be solved with one’s existing knowledge, skills and tools…”

The most transformative words we can say…
“I don’t know.”
"In times of great change, learners inherit the earth, while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped for a world that no longer exists."

Eric Hoffer
So what works?

“Shifting…”
The Challenge of a Changing World

- Figuring out what KIND of challenge you are facing...and then shifting the system to discover new strategies for addressing that challenge.
Key Adaptive Principle #1

- Give solution work back to those who experience the problem most greatly.

“Pastor” the process
Escape the Expert Expectation
Leadership as Learning

“Consists of the learning required to address conflicts in the values people hold, or to diminish the gap between the values people stand for and the reality they face.”

Ronald Heifetz
Key Adaptive Principle #2

The new solution to our challenge will be a healthy adaptation of the “DNA” of the group.

- *Work with those who are the healthiest expressions of the group DNA.*
- “Adapt” to the maturing and motivated.
First Sunday School Held on Beach at San Clemente
Determine what will NEVER change and then be prepared to change anything and everything else.
Key Adaptive Principle #3

- People don’t resist change; they resist *loss*.
“Get beyond Win–Win”

“Win–win is lose–lose.”
Key Adaptive Principle #4

- Expect sabotage.
“Leadership is disappointing your own people at a rate they can absorb.”

Ronald Heifetz
PREPARE FOR DISAPPOINTMENT.
Questions to Consider

- How has church changed in your lifetime?
- Describe the “uncharted territory” that we are in today?
- What do you think it will require of us as leaders?
A still, small voice in a still, small worship service....
"Your people need you to lead them, even more than preach to them."