

Here's a comparison for all who are world history buffs – or for anyone else who is interested in history or leadership.

We're going to take a look at Tsar Ivan IV, the first crowned tsar of Russia, and Nelson Mandela, the first post-apartheid president of South Africa. Both men had authority. Both changed the world. Their approach to authority, however, was very different.

Ivan IV was a tsar in the 16th century. The first part of his reign was progressive. He accomplished many good things in Russia – solidifying the Orthodox Church's position there and introducing the printing press that was used for printing many religious works. He also modernized many of its ancient law codes. Then famine and plague hit Russia. Ivan's wife also died, and he believed she had been poisoned. He began a reign of terror against the aristocracy in Russia, tortured and killed many, and expelled most of the rest. He set up new leaders over the peasants who mistreated them. These actions earned him the nickname of Ivan the Terrible. When conditions became challenging and threatening, Ivan used his authority to help himself and to seek revenge rather than using it on behalf of the people.

Now let's look at Nelson Mandela. Mandela fought against the apartheid regime, eventually joining forces with an organization to overthrow that government and exchange it with one elected by and responsive to all the people in the country, regardless of race. For his involvement, he

was sentenced to life imprisonment but was released after 27 years because of international pressure. He negotiated an end to apartheid and was elected president in the first election in South Africa in which all citizens could vote. He used his position to negotiate reconciliation among the races. He also founded a charity to combat poverty and AIDS. When conditions became threatening, Mandela used his authority to help the people, even at a significant loss to himself.

The chief priests and elders seem all hung up with Jesus's authority. Jesus was a threat to their own authority over the people, and that's why they challenged him. The chief priests were using their authority to help themselves stay in power – not to help the people draw closer to God.

Jesus, on the other hand, used his authority to love us, to die for us, and to challenge those who use their authority over others for their own good.

Most of us have authority over something or someone – whether formally or informally. We have authority over classrooms or departments in businesses. We have authority as vestry leaders or church committee chairs. We are the family matriarch or patriarch.

As followers of Christ, we are called to use that authority for the good of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is a place where differences are reconciled, poverty eradicated, all people viewed as equals to each other because God is in all of them. We are called to use our

authority to bring about these things in the world. We are called to use our authority to find ways toward unity in the classroom, the corporation, the church, the family, or wherever we are. We are called to help those less fortunate than ourselves and to advocate for them. We are called to see God in all persons. We are called to do good for those we have authority or influence over, even if doing so puts ourselves at a disadvantage. We are called to use our authority as Jesus did – to heal, to feed, to care for, to love – no matter where that love leads us. We are called to value meeting the needs of others above meeting our own needs.

Using authority to value the needs of others above those of ourselves can be challenging, especially in times of economic chaos, unrest, and a pandemic. Yet the more challenging the times got for Jesus, the more he used his authority for the good of others, at the expense of himself. Jesus could have used his authority to flee from conflict with the chief priests. Jesus could have used it to escape from the soldiers that arrested him to take him to the trial that led to his death. Instead, Jesus used his authority to die for us.

People in authority can change the world. Ivan IV did. Nelson Mandela did. Jesus did. The chief priests and scribes did. We can too, or at least, we can each change a part of the world and together change all of it.

If we use our authority to promote only our own ambitions, we move the world down the path of selfishness and lack

of compassion, just like Ivan IV and the chief priests did. If we use our authority as Mandela and Jesus did, we can bring about peace and reconciliation. We are followers of Jesus. We use our authority to bring about the Kingdom of Heaven on earth –with all the love and peace that brings with it. We use our authority to save the world.