

1 Peter 5:1-4  
Fourth Sunday after Pentecost  
July 3, 2022

As you listened to the Second Lesson from 1 Peter you may have thought, "That reading fits for the installation of a pastor." You would be correct; in fact, the only time I have preached on this text previously was for such an event many years ago. But no, we're not surprising you with the sudden appearance of a new pastor today, nor with news of an acceptance of our call. As we await such a time it is useful for us to be reminded of what the ministry is about. We note

### SHEPHERDS CARE FOR GOD'S FLOCK

- I. As willing servants
- II. As godly examples
- III. As blessed believers

The Apostle Peter was well-qualified to speak on the topic of the Christian ministry and the care that spiritual shepherds give to God's flock. He was the one to whom Jesus gave the assignment, "Feed my lambs...feed my sheep." That instruction occurred when the Savior reinstated him. Remember that Peter had denied association with Jesus after his arrest, so our Lord reassured the repentant Peter after his resurrection that he still had work for him to carry out. He would provide spiritual care to young and old alike.

Peter had experienced both the heights and depths of the Christian experience. Think of the joy he must have felt after being filled with the Holy Spirit and preaching to the crowd on Pentecost when 3000 joined the ranks of believers. Or there was the firm confession he voiced, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," when Jesus asked his disciples what they believed. Those words received commendation from him as the rock on which his Church is built.

Peter also shortly after that received the shock of the rebuke, "Get behind me, Satan," when he tried to deter Jesus from going ahead to meet suffering and death in Jerusalem. As I mentioned, he was also guilty of denying with an oath that he even knew Jesus, followed by tears of remorse.

In this letter Peter refers to himself as "a witness of Christ's sufferings." He had walked this earth with the Lord for nearly three years, learning from him. He saw the miracles Jesus performed. He was there in the Upper Room in Jerusalem on Maundy Thursday evening and in the Garden of Gethsemane. He mourned the

loss as Christ lay in the grave after being crucified. But he also entered the empty tomb on Easter morning.

He looked ahead to a future with his Savior as "one who will also share in the glory to be revealed." He knew the blessing that awaited him in heaven because of his Savior.

Those experiences provided motivation for ministry. It was true for himself and for those he was addressing. He termed them "elders." They were men who had been assigned spiritual care for groups of believers, what would compare today with the work of pastors. He also called them "overseers" to look after souls. They were to serve, "not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be." You can't know what Jesus has done for you without responding. He endured pain and misery on the cross, more than the physical suffering as he was forsaken by his Father. That meant enduring the agony of hell. He did it for us, all of us, not just pastors. Everyone is impacted by the work of Jesus as our Substitute; all must be impressed. He loved us that much! Of course we want to serve him, even if that means great hardship as we heard Paul review last Sunday. Our service is not forced or done merely as a duty. It is not because we get a paycheck, although God's people do support those who bring the gospel to them.

We are "eager to serve." We know personally the blessing of the rescue from sin that Jesus brought. We also know others need to have the same blessing. No individual can gain heaven by his or her own doing. They are all lost in sin, steeped in it already at birth and continuing in it until death. That condition means they should face eternal suffering in hell. We don't want that, even for our enemies. We have the solution and want to share the good news. We do so gladly and rejoice when the Spirit produces faith. May we all work together to that end!

## II.

Teaching is essential. We want the Savior to be known. As with much of life, lessons are caught as much as taught. Shepherds care for the flock as godly examples. There are different types of leadership. Some make demands. They strike fear in everyone around. "Do this or else!" Such treatment may achieve results with forced obedience but there is no joy in following their orders. That is not the way of our Savior. Last week we heard Jesus rebuke the offer of James and John to call down fire from heaven on those who spurned him. Shepherds have a staff but it is used to guide the sheep, not club them. They also had a rod but for the purpose of defending them from foes. Peter here instructed the elders not to be

lording it over the people they served. There is respect received but it is not to be used for a power trip or to feed one's ego.

Peter spoke of the people as being entrusted to the workers. That reference carries the thought of responsibility and of accountability. The flock actually belongs to another, a higher shepherd. They are the flock of Jesus. He paid the price for them. They are his sheep, purchased with his own blood. He is vitally interested in their welfare. Think of the care that shepherds gave to their flocks. They had to forego personal comfort as they stayed out in the fields. They led the sheep to places with good water and fresh pasture. They guarded and protected the sheep from danger. They went to seek those that strayed. They cared for the sick and wounded. That's the pattern for spiritual shepherds: serve. They are in charge but they are not bossy. There's no "my way or the highway" mentality.

Instead they are to be "examples to the flock," Peter instructed. Obviously that involves being in faith and growing in it. You can't expect others to do what you are not doing. Feed on the Word. It is much more appealing than grass. We view it with Ezekiel as "sweeter than honey."

Faith needs to be lived. The ways of right are to be followed. One's lifestyle needs to be consistent with the faith confessed. Live uprightly as an advertisement for the Savior. Others will be attracted by it and God will be glorified.

Of course, we won't achieve perfection in our example. No one on this earth can do so. Then we will accept admonition and admit our mistakes. We will listen to our brothers and sisters. And we go to the Savior in repentance and receive his forgiveness, which also imparts the power to fight sin.

We use the term "evangelical" in the name of our congregation and of our church body. It also describes our manner. We are gospel oriented, not heavy on the club of the law. We will point out sin but then overwhelm with God's love and forgiveness, bringing the Spirit's power to change sinful ways. It is easy to get impatient and resort to force or threats to coerce desired activity. Results may come, but they are not fruits of faith, not joyful Christian behavior offered in love for Jesus. Fill people with the gospel, which then overflows in a life of faith.

### III.

Christ's undershepherds serve as blessed believers. Peter highlighted the chief or highest blessing. "When the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away." Winners of athletic contests received a wreath, but like all plant products, it withered in time. God's crown of glory is eternal life.

You likely recall the verse from Revelation often used at the time of confirmations or funerals, "Be faithful even to the point of death and I will give you the crown of life." Heaven awaits believers, both pastors and parishioners. It will bring joy without equal. Heaven is the home of beauty and peace as we praise the Lord for all he has provided for us. Everything will be perfect, with no pain, sadness or sin to disturb our existence. It is all the gift of Jesus, won by his life and his death for us and received by the faith planted and nurtured through the means of grace shared by the messengers of the Lord.

A special joy will be seeing those whose lives you touched with the gospel and those who impacted your faith. The Bible indicates there will be recognition for those whose work brought many to faith. Whatever is received, it will be a gift of grace. We look forward to the crown of eternal life.

Believers are not just blessed in the life to come but God's goodness comes in the present as well. The Word gets results. As we believe and share our faith we enjoy a blessed fellowship here on earth with likeminded believers. We rejoice together in worship. We work as a harmonious team, passing the faith on to the next generation, reaching out to others and increasing the flock, giving and receiving encouragement when life's challenges get us down, and building up one another in the faith.

Shepherd and flock, pastors and members are a mutual blessing. As we feed on the Word, may God bless us with such joy as we serve him together.

Shepherds care for the flock of Jesus as willing servants and godly examples. As faith grows and flourishes, together we serve the Lord Jesus, the source of our blessings now and eternally. Let us do so with eagerness and joy!