

1 Peter 5:1-4

5 Therefore, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and as one who also shares in the glory that is about to be revealed, I appeal to the elders among you: ²Shepherd God's flock that is among you, serving as overseers, not grudgingly but willingly, as God desires, not because you are greedy for money but because you are eager to do it. ³Do not lord it over those entrusted to your care, but be examples for the flock. ⁴And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive an unfading crown of glory.

Installation Service

I.

Right in front of the pulpit sat the pastor who was about to be installed as pastor of that congregation, as is often the custom in our churches. He was in his preaching robe and a red stole. Red is the color for the paraments for such a festive occasion as the installation of a pastor.

On the other side of the church, in the front rows, sat some more pastors, also with their white robes and red stoles. When the service would finally reach the actual installation, one by one, each of the pastors present for the installation would lay a hand on the head of the one being installed and speak a few words of encouragement for the ministry and give a Bible verse that applies well to ministry.

Before the service would ever reach that moment, one of the pastors would preach a sermon. Normally, the pastor asked to preach for an installation knows the one being installed fairly well. There might be some stories from their time at the Seminary together. Perhaps they had once served nearby congregations, and there would be shared experiences.

It can happen, of course, that the installing pastor *doesn't* know the one being installed all that well. If there aren't close-by ministry friends, it might be the vacancy pastor, or the circuit pastor who has the honor. In the end, whether the two know each other well or not, they have some things in common. They have walked in the shoes of a pastor. If the one being installed is a new Seminary graduate, he is about to walk in the shoes of a pastor.

It's a solemn obligation and responsibility. It's a road fraught with danger. It's a road only a few can help one navigate. There are some reminders that are important to hear.

II.

Peter's began his First Letter this way: "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the elect, temporary residents in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (1 Peter 1:1, EHV). You can see by this introduction that he was writing to many members of a number of different congregations.

Though the pastors in those many congregations had long since been installed, this part of his letter seems almost like an installation sermon. "Therefore, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and as one who also shares in the glory that is about to be revealed, I appeal to the elders among you" (1 Peter 5:1, EHV).

Just like members in a congregation that has received a new pastor, the congregations listened in as Peter spoke to their pastors.

You pastors, he said, have some challenges. Peter didn't go into detail about them. Sometimes pastors seem standoffish. While the pastor wants to be close to his members and understand their needs and their feelings, sometimes he might be called on to do what Ezekiel had to do in today's First Reading. God told Ezekiel: "The house of Israel will not

be willing to listen to you because they are not willing to listen to me, because the whole house of Israel is hard-headed and hard-hearted...¹¹Go now to the exiles, to your own people. You shall speak to them and say to them, 'This is what the LORD God says,' whether they listen or they do not" (Ezekiel 3:7, 11, EHV).

Ezekiel wasn't given any choice in this matter. He *had* to tell the people what God told him to say; if he *didn't*, he would be unfaithful to God. "Shepherd God's flock that is among you," says Peter (1 Peter 5:2, EHV). Shepherd is not just a noun, but a verb.

God often sent prophets like Ezekiel. There were often false prophets among the people, giving the people what they *wanted* to hear. The false prophets often had more uplifting messages. God's true prophets were specifically called not just to speak the truth, but to expose false doctrine. Luther says: "A pastor must not only lead to pasture by teaching the sheep how to be true Christians: but, in addition to this, he must also repel the wolves, lest they attack the sheep and lead them astray with false doctrine and error. For the devil does not rest" (LW 30:135).

Shepherd God's flock. Sometimes it's much more personal than simply speaking against false doctrine that might confuse people. Sometimes it means speaking to someone about his or her own personal sin. Like Ezekiel, the pastor is required to say: "This is what the Lord God says," whether the person likes it or not. Rather than hear the rebuke as something from God, the person will often leave the congregation in anger or disgust.

"Shepherd God's flock" can be a lonely business. Usually there is no one the pastor can talk to about this...except fellow pastors. That's why it's nice to have a group of fellow pastors at an installation. They know. They understand.

Peter goes on: "Shepherd God's flock that is among you, serving as overseers, not grudgingly but willingly, as God desires" (1 Peter 5:2, EHV). Peter's installation sermon goes on to another potential challenge: serving grudgingly.

The phone rings in the middle of sermon preparation. Caller ID lights up with a member's name. There's no way to know before he answers whether it's going to be a simple prayer request for Sunday, or an emergency counseling session, a hospital visit, or a call to go visit a member who is dying. All he knows is he must drop everything for a while. If necessary, sermon preparation will have to go on late into the night, or be completed on the day off. "Not grudgingly, but willingly," the pastor is to serve the flock he oversees.

"Do not lord it over those entrusted to your care, but be examples for the flock" (1 Peter 5:3, EHV). Would you believe that pastors sin? I know—that comes a shock. Only Jesus, called the Chief Shepherd by Peter in these verses, was without sin. Every other pastor who stands in front of a congregation could be called a hypocrite.

You may remember your Catechism recitations and the Table of Duties recitation titled: "Pastors." It begins ominously: "A pastor must be above reproach..." That phrase comes from the words of Paul to Timothy (1 Timothy 3:2). Paul didn't mean without sin. Even St. Paul wasn't without sin. Luther writes: "Before God no one is above reproach, but before men the bishop is to be so, that he may not be a fornicator, an adulterer, a greedy man, a foul-mouthed person, a drunkard, a gambler, a slanderer. If he is falsely accused, no harm; he is still above reproach; no law can accuse him before men" (LW 28:284).

Luther writes this about the same subject: "According to the list Paul makes, he should not have public guilt which causes people to stumble. Paul is referring to public vices which can be made the subject of an accusation" (LW 29:17-18). While certain sins become tolerated by society, and even cheered on, they are not the kinds of things people expect or should tolerate in a pastor.

All this Peter wraps into that one verse: “Do not lord it over those entrusted to your care, but be examples for the flock” (1 Peter 5:3, EHV). What a challenge to every pastor! Every one of us knows we can’t be perfect, like Jesus, but somehow, some way, we are to be examples for the flock. It can become overwhelming, at times.

III.

“Shepherd God’s flock that is among you...not because you are greedy for money but because you are eager to do it” (1 Peter 5:2, EHV). Peter’s succinct installation sermon continues. What a privilege it is for the pastor to eagerly serve God’s people!

At Pastors’ Conferences there is always a communion service. At such a service, one of the pastors—several years older than I am, and with more years in the ministry—was distributing the body and blood in, with, and under the bread and wine with shaking hands. He didn’t have some illness that caused him to shake, but told me that his hands *always* shook because he considered distributing the Lord’s Supper to be such a precious and humbling experience.

There are lots of jobs where you can make plenty of money. There aren’t many jobs where you are allowed the privilege of spending hours immersed in God’s Word as part of your duties. There aren’t many jobs where a person has the privilege of speaking the message of salvation in Christ Jesus as part of the responsibilities of the job.

It seems that the Sunday afternoon nap is a common occurrence for many pastors. The Sunday sermon is the place where the pastor gets to speak God’s Word to the most people at one time. While it isn’t some theatrical performance, you want the whole service to be done as well as possible because it is to the glory of God. The pastor expends a lot of energy; and then goes home and collapses.

Peter began: “As a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and as one who also shares in the glory that is about to be revealed...” (1 Peter 5:1, EHV). That is the whole reason for the pastor’s eagerness to shepherd God’s flock. The sufferings of Christ mean that the sins of the world have been paid for.

The people of the congregation need to hear both law and gospel. They have to hear that their sins have separated them from God, that sin angers God, that God does not tolerate or condone sin. But they also need to hear the gospel of Jesus: that he died to pay for every one of those sins; that the Holy Spirit has made you a child of God; that when God looks at you, he doesn’t see those sins that he hates, but the righteousness and perfection of Jesus that covers those sins.

IV.

“When the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive an unfading crown of glory” (1 Peter 5:4, EHV). I have been known to say that I have a retirement plan that is out of this world. The Chief Shepherd is coming back for me, unworthy undershepherd though I might be.

Today’s Gospel was about Jesus sending out the 72. It would seem this might have been a limited call for that period of time. They weren’t permanent missionaries, but lay people sent to speak God’s Word for a time. When they came back, Jesus said to them: “Rejoice that your names have been written in heaven” (Luke 10:20, EHV).

The Chief Shepherd is coming back again. He is not coming back just for me. He is not coming back just for the pastors to whom Peter was speaking his installation sermon. He is coming back for all believers. “When the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive an unfading crown of glory” (1 Peter 5:4, EHV).

Pray for pastors. Support them. Wait with them for the unfading crown of glory that also belongs to you. Amen.