

"Pastor, Shepherd of the Flock"

1 Peter 5:1-4

31 December Anno Domini 2001

Eve of the Circumcision and Name of our Lord -- New Year's Eve

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

Emmett, Idaho

Pastor Michael L. McCoy

Grace, mercy and peace to you in the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Dear Baptized,

During the Advent and Christmas seasons of the church year, we have heard the Word concerning shepherds and we have learned much about them and from them. Do you remember them all? Here's a quick review and summary of these Shepherds of Advent and Christmas:

At the beginning of Advent, the congregation was invited to take an historic trip back in time, all the way to the see Abel, Shepherd at the Altar. In faith, Abel presents his offering to the LORD. After departing in peace from the Holy Place, Abel is murdered by Cain, his brother. We heard that Abel's blood cried out for vengeance while the Blood of Jesus cries out for pardon and speaks forgiveness. Abel was the first Christian martyr and though his voice was silenced and he is now in the Church triumphant, "through his faith he is still speaking" (Hebrews 11:5).

Next was Noah, Shepherd of the Ark and we heard that he was a preacher of God's righteousness and a faithful shepherd whose tiny congregation was eight in number, including himself. Nevertheless, Noah had the Supernumerary on board as the ark was baptized in the waters of the deep, while the Flood washed all the unclean from the face of the earth.

The account of David, Shepherd in the Field - of his being the one anointed by Samuel to be king, as well as his defeat of Goliath on the battlefield - pointed us to Jesus, the Son of David - Him being the Anointed One and the Defeater of Satan in the wilderness. The other evening, the Good News of Jesus' Birth was told to us by those Children, Shepherds at the Manger. The congregation beheld these shepherds "glorifying and praising God for they had heard and seen, as it had been told them."

On Christmas Eve the sermon was titled, "Moses, Shepherd on the Mountain" and we understood that the LORD revealed to Moses in the Burning Bush is the same God manifested to His Church when the Infant Redeemer was placed in a manger. On Christmas Day the message of Jesus, Shepherd at Bethlehem, reminded us that here, when we gather in the gracious Presence of God, it is the Lord Jesus Who feeds His flock through Word and Sacrament it is here where there is eternal Life in His Name and salvation proclaimed.

The seventh sermon delivered spoke of Joseph, Shepherd of the Lamb and how Joseph received his first call to be a servant of the Word. He was suddenly called to and entrusted with both his bride and the real Presence of Christ in an alien and foreign land, and then called back to the land of Judah. Joseph was the shepherd of the Lamb for at least twelve years and then the pages of Holy

Writ speak no more of him. Years after Joseph's silent departure, Jesus goes into the Jordan River and the desolate wilderness. He delivers the Sermons on the Mount and on the Plane. He heals the sick and forgives the sinner. He goes up to Jerusalem and is lifted up on a cross. Jesus the Christ pays the price for the sins of the world and gives His Life for you.

On the third day He rose again from the dead and instituted the New Testament Ministry of the Word, when "on the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, even so I send you.' And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained'" (John 20:19-23).

Peter was one of the men there that evening - one who heard this glorious, comforting, wonderful, glad Good News of Holy Absolution. Years later, Peter would write an epistle of hope to the persecuted exiles, that is, to the congregations of Christ who were being tested. Included in that letter, near the end, Peter specifically writes to men who were what we would term "pastors." The New Testament also calls them "overseers," "presbyters," "bishops," and "shepherds." Peter addresses them as elders.

The sermon text is 1 Peter 5:1-4. Please listen to that portion of Holy Writ as we hear the final sermon in our sermon series of the Shepherds of Advent and Christmas ...

... "Pastor, Shepherd of the Flock"

"So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ as well as a partaker in the glory that is to be revealed. Tend the flock of God that is your charge, not by constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly, not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd is manifested you will obtain the unfading crown of glory."

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God.

Since 1 Peter is an epistle or a letter, it already is a sermon and therefore, is certainly suitable for preaching by itself. At the same time, there is much to be gleaned from an extended examination of its parts and portions. For example, the portion of the fifth chapter just read is straightforward enough and, while intended specifically as an exhortation for pastors, is also of benefit to the flock of God. Thus this sermon is divided into two sections and the first part is directed to you - the flock of God, which is the congregation and is delivered to you - the sheep or the lamb, that is, the individual Christian whether adult or child.

Dearly beloved members of the royal priesthood,

"Peter, an Apostle of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:1) was writing the truth of God's Word to you - to God's people who were scattered across the face of a large land. In a dying world of mankind's "hope-so hope," he wanted the Word of God's "know-so hope," that is, the proclamation of Christ's sin-atonement of death and death-defeating Easter morn Resurrection hope to be heard and

believed. In a time when there be both foe and traitor ... of terrorists in the world and of errorists in the Church ... he wanted the people of God to hear the Law that always accuses the sinner and the Gospel that soothes the soul of the penitent. Concerning this, Peter desired what the LORD God willed ... namely, that the Word in its truth and purity be told and taught both to those within as well as to those without the Church.

Indeed, with the LORD God there is forgiveness of all sins and salvation in the Name of Jesus the Christ and in Baptism you are sprinkled with His Holy Blood and covered with His Perfect Righteousness. In His Word of continual forgiveness there is peace with God. In fact, "by His great mercy," you have "an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:3-5).

"In order that we may obtain this faith, the Ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and the Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given, and the Holy Spirit produces faith, where and when it pleases God, in those who hear the Gospel. That is to say, it is not on account of our own merits but on account of Christ that God justifies those who believe, that they are received into favor for Christ's sake. (Gal. 3:14) 'That we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.'" [AC V].

This was all done so that you, dear Christian, might hear the Word of God from a faithful undershepherd and know that eternal life and salvation are yours and are his because he and you are forgiven in the Name of the Father and the (+) Son and the Holy Spirit.

Now the second part of the sermon. The words that follow are directed to you as if all of you congregated here were men who were pastors in the Lord's Church. Or, if that seems strange to imagine, then please perceive the reality that I am preaching to myself.

Dear pastors in the brotherhood,

The preaching of the Law to you is easier, in that there are more applications and greater standards. To be convinced of this, one need only look at the Lord's Call extended through His Church to you; the supplemental Diploma of Vocation with its list of authorizations and obligations; as well as your ordination vows with their promises and subscriptions. Indeed, to whom much is given, much is expected. Add the fact that, due either to the passage of the years or the diseases of the days, or both, you are no longer now, or you eventually will not be, able to do what you once did. Then there are those temptations to use your office in order to be domineering over the people of God, or to be engaging in greedy games for shameful gains. But then you read 1 Peter 5 and see the Law applied. So, in sorrow and contrition, you recognize your pride, you humble yourself, and then you become proud of your humility. Now you recognize that you've got yourself a real pity party brewing, so who in the world needs to make more New Year's resolutions? Really, who needs more law when you cry out: "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:24-25).

Indeed, yes. "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord," for your salvation is not based upon the number of deeds done, not because of works. Your salvation is not yours because you are a pastor. Likewise, your salvation is not denied because of the number of transgressions of His Holy Law. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the Gift

of God, not because of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

In addition there is another blessing given to you. Often there is a loneliness of the pastoral office that is numbing and awakens a man during the dark hours of the night. It is brought on by our old sinful nature and the old evil foe accusing the conscience. This is not unique and you are not the only one suffering like this or like that. There are many others who, like you, have neither bent the knee to Baal nor shared a stage with one or more of Baal's boys. Indeed, Peter, a fellow shepherd, indicated this blessing of knowing that there are many men like you when he wrote: "Resist him (the devil), firm in your faith, knowing that the same experience of suffering is required of your brotherhood throughout the world" (1 Peter 5:9).

You are a member of the brotherhood that is dispersed throughout this world. The things that are happening to you on account of the preaching of the Word of Law and Gospel, and the administration of the Sacraments as Christ instituted them, ... these trials that you are experiencing, whether or not you deserve them, are not restricted to you. God knows that it is not well for you to be alone and, in addition to the Lord being with you, He has provided the brotherhood - and that brotherhood includes other men who are servants of Christ and stewards of the Mysteries of God. Behold a brotherhood whose members are scattered across the face of the earth. What a comfort and assurance that there are these others.

But please know this, the brotherhood not only extends geographically but also in time. You were called to the Lord's Church as one of His pastors and you are a pastor of Christ's Church on earth, but for a certain period of time. Only the Lord knows how long. A pastor likely remembers the day when he spoke the Invocation in the Divine Service for the first time; seldom does a man know when it's the final Benediction. However, there will come a day when you will no longer be able to lead the flock of God entrusted to your care and, unless the Lord returns during your watch, another man will take your place. Would that each of you might be able to join the apostle in say to the Church, "I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4).

Many pastors have preceded you. While you may have met a few of those pastors who preceded you, most of them are known only to God. Or, don't you remember that one pastor who, after attending to his work at the altar, was invited by a farmer from the congregation to come out into a field? There the farmer rose up and murdered the shepherd. Or, do you not recall that one shepherd who was faithful in preaching the righteousness of the LORD for so long in that huge church, yet had only eight members therein? What a zoo! Then there was Moses. Oh, and Joseph, the Shepherd of the Lamb. And of course and especially and particularly and of most importance, the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Himself. And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of other pastors in the brotherhood ... men like Nathan, Timothy, Clement, Gerhard, Barry and you, ... yes, you, for surely you are one of the Shepherds of Advent and Christmas.

But wait! I have, in my possession at this moment, a letter written long ago and addressed to you from one of your fellow pastors in the brotherhood. Permit me to read it to you as a fitting conclusion to this sermon.

"So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ as well as a partaker in the glory that is to be revealed. Tend the flock of God that is your charge, not by

constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly, not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd is manifested you will obtain the unfading crown of glory. Likewise you that are younger be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

"Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that in due time He may exalt you. Cast all your anxieties on Him, for He cares about you. Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experience of suffering is required of your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, Who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, and strengthen you. To Him be the dominion for ever and ever. Amen."