

Shepherds and their sheep

I was Rector of Riverstone for 9 years. It is a semi-rural area out near Windsor west of Sydney. We had a large area of grass beside our house and I was sick of mowing this grass so we borrowed a sheep to keep the grass down. We tethered it near a tree and left it to do its job.

One evening we went out and there was no sign of the sheep. I had gone. We went searching with torches looking into people's back yards. Finally I went to the police station just round the corner from the church and I reported we had lost a sheep at the church.

They thought it was a great joke. "Lost one of your flock have you!!?" Well like Little Bo Peep the sheep turned up by itself in the end.

After Riverstone I was Rector of Sans Souci which is near the airport. It is certainly not a rural area. One Saturday morning a neighbor rang us and said there is a sheep on the church doorstep. We went out and sure enough there was a sheep there. I rang the police but they didn't know what to do with it. They said keep it till Monday when the RSPCA would be open. So we did.

Well it's like that in ministry you have to look after the flock. You win some and you lose some!

In Bible times people were very familiar with the scene of a shepherd looking after his sheep. The shepherd would know each sheep by name. He cared for each of them. He would lead the flock out in the morning, guide them, and find food and water for them. He would protect them from danger, from lions or other beasts. It was a great image of God's care for his people.

So Psalm 23 says,

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

² *He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside quiet waters,*

³ *he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.*

⁴ *Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*

It is a wonderful image of God isn't it? Then Jesus tells us he is the Good Shepherd. He loves his sheep so much that he lays down his life for us.

In the Old Testament the kings are called the shepherds of Israel. They were supposed to care for the people like a shepherd but often they failed to lead like shepherds. They exploited the people rather than cared for them.

So there is all that rich background to the New Testament which also calls church leaders shepherds of God's people. "Pastor" means shepherd, and Church pastors need to lead their flock like a shepherd.

1. Church leaders - shepherds

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: (5:1)

Peter was an elder, a shepherd. He had failed and denied Jesus when Jesus was on trial but after the resurrection on the beach Jesus had forgiven him and told him to “Feed my sheep.” (John 21:15-17) Leaders aren’t perfect. They are forgiven sinners like all of us. But God can use forgiven sinners to minister to his people.

At Martin’s Commencement the bishop will say, *“My brother Martin, at your ordination, you were exhorted in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to remember the dignity of the high office and charge to which you were called: that is to say, to be a messenger, watchman, and steward of our Lord; to teach and forewarn, to feed and provide for the Lord’s family; to seek for Christ’s sheep who are scattered abroad, and for his children who are surrounded by temptation in this world, that they may be saved through Christ forever.*

Have always therefore printed in your mind how great a treasure is committed to your care: the church is Christ’s flock, for whom he shed his blood. This church and congregation whom you must serve is his bride and body. Pray to God the Father, through our Saviour Jesus Christ, for the assistance of the Holy Spirit; so that as you daily read and study the Scriptures, you may grow in your ministry. By God’s grace, may you be a godly pattern for the people to follow, as you seek to conform your life and the life of this congregation to the teaching of Christ.”

It is a great responsibility that he takes on. His ministry will affect under God the eternal future of many people. We need to pray for him and support and encourage him. It is not easy leading a congregation. He will need all the help we can give him.

This passage doesn’t just apply to rectors. Many of us have leading roles in church: in the children’s ministries, homes group leadership, school Scripture, youth group and so on. We need to hear these words:

² *Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve;*

³ *not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. (5:2-3)*

- Willingly – Don’t take on jobs grudgingly out of guilt or a sense of duty. You won’t do it well if you do.
- Not for gain – of money or gain of personal acclaim. Don’t do it for self-interest but to serve others
- Not abusing your position by bossing people around.
- Be an example – that’s the scary bit. People are watching. It doesn’t mean we are perfect but we must seek to set the right example of a Godly life.

It is a great responsibility to lead God’s people. It must not be done for the wrong reasons or half-heartedly. But there is also the promise of a great reward.

⁴ *And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. (5:4)*

2. Church people – sheep

⁵ *In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. (5:5)*

Those who have the position of Pastor or Elder aren't always older than us. We all, whatever age, need to submit to their leadership.

I chose to preach on 1 Peter early in the year but I hadn't seen that this would give us this chapter in the week before Marty begins his ministry here. It is a very appropriate passage to be looking at at this time. We need to think about how we respond to Marty's leadership.

- One thing to avoid is making comparisons. He will be different to Bruce and will have different gifts. It is very unhelpful to make comparisons.
- We need pray for him and Jasmine and encourage them. Moving into a new church and getting to know us all isn't easy. Do what you can to be helpful, wear a name tag and take the initiative in introducing yourself. Don't expect them to know all our names after the first week!
- Submit doesn't mean you have to agree with everything he does. If there is some issue, talk to him not behind his back. But give him time to settle in then speak lovingly not attacking him. You have been a very encouraging congregation so I am sure you will be very kind to him.
- He will bring about some changes. He will do some things differently. Change is never easy. Let's all be patient and work positively with him.

Hebrews says this: ¹⁷ *Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you. (Hebrews 13:17)*

Let's seek to make Martin and Jasmine's time here a great joy not a burden.

3. Peter then concludes with three exhortations:

a) Be humble

Think of the difference between dogs and cats. The human pets a dog, and the dog wags its tail and thinks, "He must be god."

The human pets his cat, and the cat purrs, shuts its eyes and thinks to itself, "I must be god." Dogs have masters, cats have servants.

We are called to be servants, to think like a dog not like a cat, to serve God and to serve each other. That's what it means to be humble, to put the needs of others before ourselves.

All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble." ⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. ⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. (5:5-7)

Be humble:

- Towards our leaders – care for them, submit to their leadership
- Towards each other - being humble is thinking of others and caring for them not just thinking of yourself.
- Towards God – accepting his will even in difficult times. We have to put ourselves in his hands and cast our cares on him being confident that he does care for us dearly. Prayerfully depending on God is basic to Christian life

b) Resist temptations from the devil

⁸ *Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.* ⁹ *Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.* (5:8-9)

As we have seen throughout the letter it is easy to react in the wrong way when unfairly treated. Satan can use difficult times to trick us. We need to continue to do good.

c) Focus on our future glory

Peter began his letter by reminding us of our eternal inheritance. He wrote about our living hope through the resurrection of Jesus. (1:3-5)

Peter says in 5:1 he will share with us the glory to be revealed. Then he says that leaders will receive a crown of glory. (5:4) Now he reminds us again of this future glory:

¹⁰ *And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.* ¹¹ *To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.* (5:10-11)

Once again he says if we focus on our eternal future we will keep the things of this life in perspective. It will shape how we live and fill us with joy in serving God.