

4th Sunday in Easter, Good Shepherd Sunday – Year B – April 29, 2012 – Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY

Based on 1Peter 5:1-4 written by Pastor Paul Horn

“Shepherd the flock”

Stuck in a dead-end job? Daydreaming about a new career? Combing through the classifieds for your next calling? Well, what about this job? Roadkill Collector: Must be able to work long hours braving oncoming traffic while picking up creatures of various size and breed and in various states of decay. Benefits include working outdoors. Strong stomach a plus.

Since it is Good Shepherd Sunday, we’re going to talk about animals, not dead ones, but living! Today we want to talk about life as a shepherd. Life as a shepherd in Bible times was not an easy job. You complain about the hours you work? Shepherds were never off duty. They worked around the clock. Why? Because the flock was always, always in danger. Thieves would look to steal sheep. Wolves and bears and lions hunted all the time. Sheep loved to wander and often became stuck in ravines. You may remember the story of David, who told King Saul, **“Your servant has been keeping his father’s sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear.”** Being a shepherd was not an easy job.

In our lesson from 1Peter 5 God gives to us the special privilege of shepherding. It is not an easy job. The hours are demanding, because this shepherding job requires 24hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year commitment. The flock we watch is under constant attack from the lions... the devil is always looking for someone to devour, the sinful world drags the sheep away from Godly priorities, and their own sinful flesh attacks them from within. It is a difficult task, one that we could never accomplish on our power. But we are not alone. The Chief Shepherd guides us, strengthens us, keeps our eyes focused on him, the Good Shepherd. Empowered by his Word and Sacraments, we will shepherd the flock, and guide them to the Good Shepherd. My friends, shepherd the flock.

Our lesson this morning from the Apostle Peter begins with an address to the elders in the church. When we think of elders, we think of an older person in the church, a man of great faith, a seasoned veteran in the affairs of the church. Peter uses the title *elder* and *overseer* to refer to the pastor. *Pastor* is actually a Latin word that means *shepherd*. But the privilege of shepherding the flock is not just the work of the pastor. Earlier in his letter (2:9) Peter said to the congregation, **“You are a royal priesthood.”** All Christians have been given the privilege of shepherding; men and women, parents, church council members, elders, and Sunday school teachers.

We may complain about the time commitment and effort but this responsibility from God is really a privilege. Notice Peter’s words, **“Be shepherds of God’s flock.”** These sheep belong to God, not just to the membership roster of Faith Lutheran Church. These sheep are God’s because he bought them. He paid a hefty price for them. We heard this morning, **“The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”** (John 10:11) Look around you. These sheep are souls that Jesus bought with own blood. What a privilege to shepherd God’s flock! **“Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care,”** this call goes out to all of us.

How do we shepherd God's flock? Peter tells us, "...**not under compulsion, but voluntarily according to the will of God.**" (vs2) Are we willing shepherds or do we say to ourselves, "Argh! The Pastor or stewardship committee chairman is going to ask me to be a Sunday school teacher again. I'll have to spend all that time preparing lessons! They'll ask me to volunteer at the *Hooray for Heroes* booth. That means I'll have to give up my free time on a Saturday! Look at these positions that are open on the church council! I don't want to serve on those committees. That takes time!" When you shepherd the flock, is it out of compulsion or done freely and willingly? With a cheerful heart or with grumbling and complaining?

Peter continues, "...**not greedy for money but eager to serve.**" (vs3) Literally, "shamefully greedy..." Do we serve as shepherds who say, "I worked so much at church this week, more than others did for sure. Somebody pat me on my back!" Or are we shepherds who are eager to serve without recognition?

Peter says, "...**not lording it over those entrusted to you, but setting the example.**" (Vs3) Are we "Because I said so" shepherds? We expect others to work the way we think things should go, or do we take the lead and humbly and lovingly set the example? Do you tell your children how important God's Word is yet you make other activities a priority over family devotion time at home? You tell your children, "Don't use bad language," yet you turn around and say things that would make your grandmother blush?

When is the last time you had a job review? How did it turn out? My last job review as pastor was 6 years ago before the church council. But this week... as I prepared this sermon, I received a very sobering job review. If the Chief Shepherd conducted a review of our job performance, as parents, Sunday school teachers, church council members, as the pastor, how likely would I be recommended to serve as a shepherd again? Not likely, since we have been lazy, proud, uncaring, setting poor examples, serving with grumbling hearts. When we shepherd that way, we lead the flock not on the path to heaven, but wandering into the claws of the roaring lion.

My fellow shepherds, do not drop your shepherd's staff in shame. We have help - the Good Shepherd, "**the Chief Shepherd**" as Peter calls him. He gently guides us back into the fold. Remember what David did? He went off and attacked the bear in order to bring the sheep safely back to the flock. Remember what Jesus did? He went out and attacked the lion, Satan, to rescue us, the sheep that were firmly in his jaws. Freely the Good Shepherd came from heaven, not under compulsion, but willingly came down to earth to battle Satan and rescue us. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, not for greedy praise, but eagerly gave up his life to win our lives back from the lion's mouth.

So determined is he, Jesus, the Good Shepherd, to keep us as sheep in his sheep pen he does everything necessary. We might think of Stephanie Decker, the mother who used her body as a human shield to protect her two children from the tornado that tore apart their home in Henryville, Indiana. By her sacrifice, she lost her legs, but her children were saved. What great love of a mother to sacrifice her life for her children! How much more so is the love Jesus has for you! By sacrificing his life for ours Jesus took the punishment our complaining, greed and pride and unfaithfulness deserved. By the Shepherd's sacrifice, he has made us pure, wooly white innocent sheep, holy and precious in his sight.

What a loving Shepherd we have, that at the end our lives, he will place on our heads **“the crown of glory that will never fade away!”** (vs4) Until that time, our faithful Shepherd guides us to heaven with his Word. He feeds us with his Lord’s Supper. He restores our souls with his precious Word. He is the Good and Faithful Shepherd!

How great is the love our Good Shepherd has for us – that in spite of our unfaithfulness he still makes us his shepherds here on earth! This is the privilege we still possess, **“Shepherd God’s flock that is under your care.”** How can we not shepherd this flock with eagerness, with willing and cheerful hearts when we see each other as precious lambs for whom Jesus laid down his life? How can we not be confident when we have a powerful yet comforting shepherd’s crook to use while shepherding? The precious Word of God!

Peter said in his letter that he was **“a witness of Christ’s suffering.”** (vs1) An important qualification for a shepherd, don’t you think? Did we not also just four weeks ago stand at the foot of the cross on Good Friday while we sat in this room with darkened windows, dimmed lights and moving music and descriptions of Jesus’ sufferings for us? Yes, we too have witnessed Christ’s sufferings – a powerful yet comforting message we will use as we shepherd this flock – the bandage that binds up the wounds of a suffering sheep, still unsure of God’s forgiveness. Here, at the cross, the Shepherd laid down his life for you!

And just three weeks ago we also stood at the empty tomb with Mary and Peter and John. There in the empty tomb we have the bandage that binds up the wounds of the sheep whose heart has been injured by the loss of a loved one. The Good Shepherd is the Risen Savior, who lives and conquers death!

Yes, life as a shepherd among God’s flock is not an easy task. Because we are dealing with sheep who are hurt and lonely, sheep who love to wander, sheep who grumble and complain, but we have the Good Shepherd on our side, who loves us and does not leave us alone as we busy ourselves with this privilege.

We will be faithful shepherds! As Peter says, **“...being examples to the flock.”** (vs3) As parents and grandparents, we will point our children to the Good Shepherd through faithful study of God’s Word in our homes and at church. As Sunday school teachers you will serve our little lambs because you want to. As church council and committee members we will lead this flock by serving with willing hearts and with humility. As long as I am your pastor, I will continue to serve this flock by guiding and feeding it with God’s Word, Holy Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. As shepherds, together we will go out and seek the wandering sheep, sheep we have not seen in this flock for some time; with our prayers, with a gentle reminder, with a loving phone call or visit on their doorstep – so that in your invitation, they hear the call of the Good Shepherd.

The flock Peter was writing to was harassed, persecuted, tired and weary. What about this flock? Are there sheep in this flock that are harassed, are there some who are beat up emotionally and spiritually, even physically? The answer to those questions is always, **“Yes!”** This is why shepherding is so hard. Our responsibility as shepherds is to point them to the Good Shepherd, who offers to them in the green pastures and quiet waters of his Word and Lord’s Supper he will restore their soul for his names’ sake. I pray that the Good Shepherd will strengthen you to carry out his work this week. Amen.