

Pastor Shaun Arndt

July 25, 2021

Sermon Text: Hebrews 14:7-8, 17-21

“Shepherds and Sheep”

Grace and peace to you from Jesus, the Good Shepherd. Amen.

Dear Friends in Christ,

I'm going to start today with a Latin lesson. (*I know*, what could be a quicker way to lose attention than talking about Latin!?) But don't worry, it's just one word. And it's one you already use. Here it is: *pastor*. There! Not so bad, right?

As you may already know, pastor is Latin word for “shepherd.” Pastor means shepherd. So really ‘pastor’ is a job description.

This word *shepherd* has applications not just for parish pastors like Pastor Werre and myself, but for all whom Christ has called into the public ministry. Indeed, the call forms for both pastors and teachers at Peace both quote Jesus words in John 21: **Feed my lambs... Feed my sheep**. That's why after we installed our 3 new teachers last Sunday, the called workers choir sang these words:

*Feed my lambs, tend My sheep,
over all a vigil keep,
in My name lead them
forth gently as a shepherd.*

As we've seen throughout our lessons today, Jesus shepherds his Church by using public ministers like pastors and teachers to lead, feed, tend and protect His flock, His Church, His **Sheep**. In our lesson from Hebrews 13, Jesus, our Good, Chief Shepherd teaches us what He expects of us, whether we called workers or lay-people, whether **Shepherds and Sheep**.

Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. When our lesson uses the word **leaders**, don't think: CEO or boss. Rather, picture a shepherd guiding a flock of sheep to safe green pastures to feed and rest and to the quiet waters to drink.

And the spiritual food and drink for our souls is **the Word of God**. So the chief task of our called workers, is to faithfully teach and preach the pure, life-giving **Word of God**, not adding to it or taking away from the words of the Bible.

This is not just in public instruction, but also includes individual application of the Word when needed, since our lesson reminds us: **they are keeping watch over your souls...** that is watching to guard against dangers that threaten the soul.

This means warning the straying and comforting the hurting. It includes the strong words of God's law to those who are following a path away from their loving Savior as well as carrying the sweet gospel promises of our Lord to those who are struggling, hurting, dying.

How and *Why* they do this is also important: **In everything we want to conduct ourselves in an honorable way.** The **shepherds** who publicly teach and preach God's Word are not to do so out of greed, power trips or with manipulation, but humbly and gently, being careful that they conduct themselves in ways that will give glory to Jesus. They are to do the best they can with the talents, time, and energy the Lord gives them.

Indeed, they are to strive to practice what they preach, so that they can be role models for God's people, so those they serve may '**imitate their faith.**'

Truly the Lord has lofty requirements and high expectations for the **shepherds** who serve His flock in the holy ministry: **they... will give an account.** Called workers must answer to the Lord how they have carried out their ministry.

At the same time, God's Word has much to say to His people, His **Sheep**. **Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Carefully consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.**

God wants his **Sheep** to **remember** those who have served us faithfully with His Word. If there is a pastor or teacher who was very dear to us because they taught us Jesus' truths, helped us to grow in faith, or was there for us in difficult time, it's not just *ok* to remember their ministry to us fondly, it's actually God's will for His people!

I think of my grade school principal who instilled and encouraged regular Bible reading by promising his students that if they wore out their confirmation Bible by reading it, he would replace it. I think of an elderly missionary who no matter whether

times were good or times were tough, you can always hear him saying: “**The Lord is good!**” –oh what confident trust in Jesus’ promises!

Yes, think about those pastors or teachers whose faithful service has left a lasting impression on you. And then listen to God’s Word: **imitate their faith**. Remember how Jesus’ love for them was the reason for their faithful service. Remember it was the Lord’s love for you that put those **shepherds** into your life.

And then strive to **imitate** what their trust in Christ led them to do. Was it their kindness, their patience, their understanding of the Bible that was a blessing to you? Then strive to reflect those blessings to others and eagerly hear and learn God’s Word the way you know they did. Take to heart and continue to follow the lessons they taught you from God’s Word so that you may still benefit from their teaching still today.

Obey your leaders and submit to them... This means listen carefully to your current pastors and teachers as they bring you God’s Word. Not just when it’s easy, but also when it’s a difficult message that runs counter to our sinful nature and our culture. Yes, even when in love, they must tell us we are wrong and warn us because we are pursuing a sinful path.

It means giving your time and attention to their teaching and preaching, faithfully coming to worship, Bible class, Sunday school, so that they may **lead** you into the green pastures and cool waters of **the Word of God**.

So that they may do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no benefit to you... When the **sheep** willingly follow and support their spiritual **shepherds**, not only does it make the **shepherds**’ hard work more enjoyable, but since their work is to care for the flock, it is a true blessing for the **sheep**, since it is your souls their work benefits.

Few things give a pastor or teacher greater **joy** than to see people they have served remain faithful to Jesus in word and action. Few things cause a pastor or teacher worse grief and **groaning** than seeing former students or souls they have served wander away from Christ and His saving truth.

Our lesson makes it clear that both **Shepherds and Sheep** are to **pray** for one another. The author of Hebrews urges his readers: **pray for us...** and then closes our lesson with a prayer for them.

There is just one huge problem with all this that we have been talking about. And that is the naturally sinful human condition— The common sinful weakness that leads to countless sins by **shepherds and sheep** alike.

Like every part of our lives, there are more sins than we could ever have time to list. There is the selfishness and pride that sticks to us gets in the way of called workers always showing patient love and care for the sheep when the work gets long, hard and overwhelming for **shepherds**.

The same selfishness and pride gets in the way of the **sheep** always humbly and obediently listening to and cooperating with their shepherds.

Our sin means our prayers for one another are never what they should be. Our sinful nature makes **shepherds and sheep** often reluctant to teach or to learn a difficult message from Scripture.

Sinners that we are, what could we possibly answer to our God whose holiness demands an accounting of every last word, thought and action – both the wrongs we committed and the good we left undone? What can we answer when we– **shepherds and sheep** – both deserve eternal punishment?

Only one Answer will do. Only one Answer will save us. The Answer God himself has provided to rescue us. The Answer that never gets old, never goes out of style. The Answer who is here today for us with His saving mercy just as He was for Moses, David, Peter, Paul and all those **leaders who spoke the word of God** to us. This is God's saving Answer: **Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.**

Jesus is **that great Shepherd of the sheep**. He doesn't just call pastors and teachers to serve, He Himself served as the only sinless Pastor and Teacher. He patiently taught His disciples when they were students who could give any teacher a headache! He faithfully taught the Scriptures not only as true God who gave them, but as true man in our place. Jesus' faith and life was blameless, pure and holy, all to save us.

If you are a called worker who is more than aware of your sin, weakness and failings, then you'll understand why I treasure these beautiful words a beloved pastor and professor who **spoke the Word of God** once said to a group of pastors: "*Yes, Jesus even saves pastors!*" Oh what beautiful words I need to hear **remember** every day!

And Jesus is also the perfect **Sheep**. For thirty some years of his life He humbly served as a layperson, working and living as a carpenter, a son, a brother, a congregation member. He perfectly listened to and learned God's Word, even when it was from imperfect human spiritual leaders, like when he was a twelve year old boy in the temple courts (Luke 2). Yes just think of it, the Lord who gave the word learning from imperfect human shepherds—all done to save you!

And for **shepherds and sheep** alike, Jesus is the perfect Lamb of Sacrifice, who on the cross shed **His blood, which established the eternal testament**. With His holy blood that He still gives us in the Lord's Supper, He forgives all our uncountable sins and remembers our wickedness no more! He himself has made the accounting to save us.

He has taken all our failures as **shepherds and sheep** and the punishment it deserves and replaced them with everlasting, heavenly **peace** with the **God of Peace** who **brought our Lord Jesus back from the dead** as the proof our sins are forgiven and that He will also raise our bodies to eternal life!

In Jesus' forgiveness, we now have Christ's perfect record of perfection as both **shepherds and sheep**. What's more, we also have strength from God Himself to live as His holy people in Jesus. This strength is not found in ourselves, but comes through Word and Sacrament as God **works in us what is pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ**, our **Great Shepherd** and **Lamb** who saves and equips both **Shepherds and Sheep**. Amen.

Now may the God of peace—who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, in connection with his blood, which established the eternal testament—

May he equip you with every good thing to do his will, as he works in us what is pleasing in his sight through Jesus Christ. Amen.

You may be seated. If you have not had a chance yet to fill out a connection card from the seat in front of you, we ask that you would please do so and then place that completed card in one of the baskets near the doors as you exit this morning.