

“...Shepherd the flock of God...”

1 Peter 5: 1-5

**First Presbyterian Church
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It was but a few weeks ago, September 18, that we elected 10 Ruling Elders to the Class of 2025. Some will be serving their second term, others will take vows and become newly ordained.

On September 24, I was privileged to have been on the Presbytery’s Commission to participate in the special service to recognize the Church of the Resurrection in New Orleans as a new and particular church, no longer a mission church or church plant. In that service five ruling elders took vows of leadership and were installed into office.

Well, our text today, 1 Peter 5:1-5, holds valuable instruction to the elders in the early church. Peter calls for them to “Shepherd the flock of God.” The church was being persecuted. They needed Godly wisdom and strength and encouragement. Peter’s instruction to the elders was to “Shepherd the Flock of God” What does that mean?

Christian Author Rhonda McRae wrote this small book a bit over 10 years ago: it is entitled, “What My Golden Retriever Taught Me about God.” Listen to what Rhonda says: “Our Creator God chooses to reveal Himself and to show who He is, what He is like, through what He has made.” She goes on to describe the many ways that her relationship with her Golden Retriever mirrors our relationship with God.

“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 going to be revealed: ² shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight,^[a] not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you;^[b] not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. ⁵ Likewise, you who 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.”1 Peter 5:1-5

When I get up in the morning I have a routine. I get the coffee set up for Becky. I read my Puritan devotional (Name), I turn off the outside lights and turn on some inside lights. I give Abby, our golden retriever, her breakfast and then settle in to read the newspaper. Abby sits patiently beside my chair watching and waiting for our morning walk. I’m reading hundreds of words that describe sporting events and news events and even recipes and restaurants. Abby has no clue what it means to do what I am doing. She cannot. She is not able to think at that level much less read the words. But Abby knows that I love her and she is patient.

Our attempts to fully understand God are limited to what we are able to grasp. Just like Abby and Rhonda’s Golden Retriever. God has revealed Himself to us through the incarnation of the Living Word, Jesus Christ and God uses His Word which is full of images and stories and pictures and people to teach us about Himself.

But before we can understand what it means to shepherd the flock of God in a spiritual sense, we have to understand the analogy from the physical side.

I’d like to begin that journey this way: I discovered this children’s book written by Susan Hunt entitled Sammy and His Shepherd. It is a wonderful representation of The 23rd Psalm and is illustrated beautifully by Cory Godbey.

Listen to some of Susan’s story about Sammy:

“I’m such a happy sheep,” Sammy thought as he grazed contentedly in the lush pasture.

He looked up and noticed a sheep in the next pasture looking longingly through the fence. He also noticed that the other pasture was not as nice as his.”

“I never noticed how many rocks and how little grass are in that pasture,” he thought.

Sammy ambled toward the fence. “Hi,” he called to the other sheep. What’s your name?”

“I don’t have a name,” the sheep said.

Sammy tried not to appear shocked, but he couldn’t imagine a sheep not having a name. Then he noticed that the sheep was very skinny and that flies were buzzing around her head.

The little sheep asked, "Do you have a name?"

"My name is Samuel, but everyone calls me Sammy."

"Where did you get your name?"

"My shepherd named me soon after he bought me. He names all of his sheep."

"Why does he do that?" the sheep asked as she shook her head to try to make the flies go away.

"Well, I guess because he loves each one of us and he knows us by name.

Samuel means 'heard by God'. I was wounded and sick when my shepherd bought me, and he prayed for me. He named me Samuel so that I would always remember that God heard his prayer."

"You sure seem happy," the little sheep said.

"Of course I'm happy. I have the best shepherd in the whole world. I know that I will never want for anything."

"How can you know that?"

"Because my shepherd loves me and he always takes care of me." Sammy answered.

"I don't understand," the little sheep said. "Look at this pasture. There's never enough grass to eat. I'm always hungry. And our water isn't very good either."

"I'm sorry you're hungry," Sammy replied. "I always have enough food and water because my shepherd provides everything I need."

"Do you mean that you never have to walk through scary valleys or climb high hills to get to different pastures?"

"Oh, no, I don't mean that I never have to go through those hard places. But my shepherd is always with me and he helps me go through those hard places."

"But what about the enemies waiting to attack you?" the little sheep asked.

"My shepherd always guards me, no matter how dangerous it is. He would even lay down his life to protect me."

"I wish I had a shepherd I could trust," the little sheep moaned."

"My shepherd is always with me and he helps me to go through those hard place."

Sheep! What do you know of sheep?

- The sheep is the only animal in the world that can be totally lost within a few miles of its home. Within its closed range, the sheep has adequate skills.
- It knows its own pasture. It knows the place it was born and nursed by its mother.
- It will invariably rest in the same shade every day. It will sleep in the same fold in the same place.

- It will stay in the home range and more than any other grazing animal, not go very far.....

BUT.....

- If that sheep is taken into unfamiliar territory it becomes completely lost. It has no sense of direction. It has no sense of orientation.
- It does not know where it is nor how to get where it's supposed to go. It cannot find its way home.
- Lost sheep will walk around baaing continually in confusion and unrest, sometimes panic.

Yes, sheep are beautiful, gentle and humble. Sheep are quite intelligent. But they are prone to get lost and if they go astray, they are helpless to find food or to find water. Without a shepherd, the billion plus sheep in the world would starve to death or die of thirst.

When sheep are led astray they are particularly vulnerable. They need to be rescued.

- They need to be protected because they cannot defend themselves.
- They can't kick. They can't scratch. They can't bite. They can't jump.
- They can't run (at least not very fast). If attacked by a predator, and there are many, they run together into a huddle making them more vulnerable.

Sheep don't know the difference between a poisonous plant and a good one. They have to have pure water because they cannot distinguish polluted water.

- Their wool coats collect insects, parasites, bugs and disease. They have to be sheared to live. Sheep left alone will die. The shepherd is the key to their life. Jesus is our Good Shepherd! In Him we live and move and have our being!

Throughout Scripture God uses this picture of a Shepherd and sheep to describe Himself and His relationship with his chosen people. The whole of the Gospel can be told in a story of a shepherd and sheep.

The Psalmist

Psalm 100:3 Know that the Lord, He is God!...we.. are the sheep of His pasture...

The Prophet

Isaiah 53:6 All we like sheep have gone astray....

God Himself (through the Prophets)

Ezekial 34:11 I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out....

Jesus

Matthew 9:36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them....they were like sheep without a shepherd.....

John 1:29 “Behold, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.”

The very first shepherd was Cain’s brother, Abel. Abraham and Moses were shepherds. King David was the best known shepherd of Bible history. He wrote the beloved 23rd Psalm. Shepherds were the first people to see the newborn Jesus. Earlier in this letter of Peter’s he says, “For you were straying like sheep but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls!”

In our passage today, Peter uses this same image but note that he uses the word Shepherd as a verb. He exhorts the elders to ‘shepherd the flock of God that is among you.....’

Well, there are three things that I want to focus on in the second half of this sermon. Three things that will help us understand why God uses this Shepherding analogy.

First, shepherding the flock of God is an awesome responsibility for our elders.

Second, the role of elders as shepherds in the life of our church.

Third, becoming a sheep in the flock of God.

- 1) Shepherding the flock of God (and I’m speaking to our elders now)
Elders, what has been put under your care is “the flock of God”. You are caring for the treasure of our Triune God, the Lord’s precious possession. And you are to do it, not under compulsion, but willingly; not domineering over those in your charge, but eagerly.
 - You are to be examples to the flock under your care, carrying out your responsibilities with humility.
 - We are the sons and daughters of our Father in heaven, born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but born of God.
 - We are the dwelling place of God’s own Spirit as Christ said to His disciples that the Holy Spirit would be with you and will be in you.

- We are members of the Body of Christ on earth. As He puts us together in one body, He has especially gifted each of us to serve Him and one another as we are called into service and ministry at First Pres.
- We are the sheep He rejoices over. We are those who heard His voice and follow Him. We are the sheep of His pasture. You are His ‘under-shepherds’ and we look to you for leadership and guidance and encouragement, and yes, even discipline and exhortation.
- We are the reason that Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, emptied himself by taking the form of a shepherd and servant.
- We are the joy that was set before Him. He shed his blood for us on Calvary.

We are the flock of God. Jesus is our Great Shepherd and, Elders, you are His under-shepherds. You have not been called by this church to fulfill an obligation that you must cover rather, the Lord Jesus is calling you to care for the love of His life, those whom the Father has given Him.

Serve us as Jesus serves us. In the upper room just hours before His arrest and death. He got up and took off His cloak, tied a towel around His waist, poured water into a basin and began washing the feet of His guests.....humble yourselves for us .

In the end the greatest way to serve us is to serve Jesus Christ above all and go deeper into His life. Then, because of Christ in you, we will follow.

- 2) So what does this shepherding of the flock of God look like? What responsibilities have our elders taken on when they were called to serve us as Christ does the church as our Good Shepherd?
- Our elders are to govern. They are to individually exercise the responsibility of order. They are to be sure that those who preach and teach and serve in our church are doing so with clarity and according to God’s Word.
 - Our elders are to insure that our prescribed order of accountability and authority is followed. They are to hold us accountable to walk worthy of the calling of God on our lives.
 - They are to study and learn the Word of God. They are to be equipped to teach the Word and pray. In this way they lead us deeper in Christ.

- As ‘under-shepherds’ they are to visit the sick, the bereaved, the lonely, the elderly, the shut-in and all those who have pastoral needs. In caring for us in this way our elders help protect us from depression, encourage us toward hope and provide the presence of Christ for spiritual protection.
- Our elders have a special responsibility to see to the development of our children. Our children are arrows in the hand of a mighty warrior who we send into the next generation as ambassadors for Christ.
- Our elders have a special responsibility to be sure that our children are nurtured in the faith so that when they come to know Christ as their Savior it will not be an encounter with a stranger because they have already learned to love Him.
- They are to reach out. They are to reach out and contact and visit those of our number who have fallen away from worship and active participation in the life of our church. They are to encourage them back into fellowship. They are to seek out and find our lost sheep.
- Our elders are to protect themselves and us, guarding against dangers that threaten our faith. and dangers to our moral lives. This means that they are responsible to warn, admonish, and reclaim those who stray from the fellowship.

Shepherds carry with them rods and staffs. They use them to direct their sheep, reach out and pull them away from danger. They use them to fight off smaller predators like wolves and bobcats and bears.

- Finally, They are to steward our financial gifts to God through our church so that they are confident that what they have invested in God’s economy bears fruit. This is one of the reasons for this stewardship Sunday. There is oversight on the part of the elders to be good stewards for your financial gifts and the wonderful church facilities and campus that has been serving Christ for so many years.

That brings us to the third element of this passage:

I said earlier that those of us who are not elders should know what it means to be a shepherd because in many ways we have been and will be shepherds to others as well: our children, our grandchildren, our brothers and sisters in Christ. We all need to know what it means to serve one another in humility, even as unto Christ.

So review the responsibilities of elders we've covered this morning. It applies also to you in many, many ways.

3) Becoming a sheep in the flock of God

- Those of us who have joined First Presbyterian Church appeared before our elders and answered questions that define our commitment and covenant with our church. Among those are these:
 - 1) Do you promise to serve Christ and His Church by supporting and participating with this congregation in its service of God and its ministry to others to the best of your ability?
 - 2) Do you submit yourself to the government and discipline of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church and to the spiritual oversight of our Church Session, and do you promise to promote the unity, purity and peace of the church?

When Becky and I first moved back to BR after spending several years in both Kansas City and Austin, I had been playing a lot of competitive handball. A friend in BR hooked me up with Don Tab who I'd never met and did not know. He was the founder and pastor of the Chapel on Campus. I also did not know that he had played competitive handball for Texas A& M.

I was warming up on the court when Don joined me. We pounded the ball around a bit before we began our first game. Don said to me, in a bold and intentional voice, "Barry, before we play I need to ask you one question." I said, "Sure, Don, what is it?" He said, "Have you come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ?" I looked him straight in the eye replied, "Yes....yes I have."

Don was exercising his giftedness as an elder to evangelize, to speak the truth of the Gospel of our Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ. His passion was to find those 'lost sheep' and call them back into the fold. His heart's desire was to find new sheep so that they might 'hear the voice of Christ' and come to know Him as their personal shepherd.

Well, after Don has determined that I was sheep in the sheepfold, he said, "Let's play ball".....He beat me 2 out of 3.

Listen to Christ's words from the gospel of John:

John “ I am the door of the sheep.....if anyone enters by me he will be saved. I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.....I know my own and my own know me...My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me.....I give them eternal life and they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of my hand.”

I'll conclude this morning by asking you that same question, “have you come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ? Have you heard your Good Shepherd's voice and followed Him? That's the most important question you will ever be asked and the most important decision you will ever make.

Let's pray.