

Leadership, Humility and Perseverance

1 Peter 5:1-11

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We are at the end of our sermon series on 1 Peter, the Rector is on holiday, but the new curate has been given the title: Leadership, humility and perseverance!

Peter begins this final chapter of his letter with advice for the Elders – or, leaders - of the churches that will receive the letter and throughout the advice are themes that have permeated the whole letter.

1. How to follow the example of Jesus the Chief Shepherd.
2. That God's mighty hand is with us and that he cares about us.
3. That the devil is real and dangerous, and we must stand firm.
4. That suffering is part of the deal but so is a share of the Glory.

So, Peter begins with Shepherding as an ultimate example to us of good leadership – why does he choose this?

Perhaps it is because of Jesus' words to Peter about leading the church at that beach breakfast described in chapter 21 of John's gospel. The resurrected Jesus appears to the disciples who are fishing in a boat on lake Galilee and he calls them to the beach for a breakfast he has prepared. At the end of the meal he asks Simon Peter three times if he loves Jesus. He then responds to each statement of "I love you" from Peter with the instructions related to shepherding:

John 21:15

(NIVUK) 15 Jesus said, 'Feed my lambs.'

John 21:16

(NIVUK) 16 Jesus said, 'Take care of my sheep.'

John 21:17

(NIVUK) 17 Jesus said, 'Feed my sheep.'

So, Peter, a fisherman by trade - received instructions from Jesus on how to lead that church that all about being a Shepherd.

However, Peter has seen the Chief Shepherd's work firsthand as his disciple - he reminds of us of this at the beginning of today's reading:

1 Peter 5:1-2

**(NIVUK) 1 ...I appeal to as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings...²
be shepherds...**

Then in verse four, he reminds us that Jesus is the Chief Shepherd and that he will return!

1 Peter 5:4

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

As we heard in our OT lesson Shepherding is an ancient description of leadership (and especially of God's leadership) that runs throughout the Bible.

Ezekiel 34:2

(NIVUK) 2 'Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: "This is what the Sovereign Lord says: woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock?"

This Shepherd idea is not new to Peter's letter. In 1 Peter 2:25 – Peter described our relation to Jesus in such terms as:

1 Peter 2:25

(NIVUK) 25 For 'you were like sheep going astray,' but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

That phrase and that focus on souls reminded me of the license I was given by the Bishop when I was ordained deacon – to share with the bishop the "Cure of Souls" here in this benefice – I am still discovering what that looks like - but here in Peter's letter we get some great guidelines.

Having seen how to Shepherd in how Jesus led - Peter has some top tips:

1. Be watchful
2. Be willing
3. Be eager to serve
4. Be an example

And equally some things *not* to be:

1. Don't do things because you must
 - (beware the hardening of the oughteries!)
2. Don't seek dishonest gain
 - (to which I am thinking 'I must be careful with my expense claims')
3. Don't Lord it over others –
 - (tricky one in a Diocese that still has a Bishops palace complete with moat and some rectory's that are mini-versions there of!)

Let's look carefully at the positive things we should be doing - being watchful; being alert - these echo with earlier verses in Peters letter.

Tom preached in week 2 on 1 Peter 1:13 -

1 Peter 1:13

(NIVUK) 13 Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming.

And it gets a mention in chapter 4 in relation to prayer:

1 Peter 4:7

(NIVUK) 7 The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray.

And later in today's passage in relation to the devil:

1 Peter 5:8

(NIVUK) 8 Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

So – we must keep watch – be aware – there maybe dangers around or within our flock we need to keep an eye on. This area of watchfulness – reminds me of the safeguarding training – that is the responsibility of all of us – to be watchful and curious of our flock – guarding their safety in all ways.

The second and third points go together: be willing and be eager to serve!

In essence, be a good shepherd, not a grumpy shepherd!

Which leads us on to the final point to be an example to the flock.

How was Christ as example to his flock? He was both the chief shepherd and the sacrificially lamb - he was willing to lay down his life for his sheep – something he himself described as the hallmark of a good shepherd compared to a hired hand in John 10.

John 10:11-15

(NIVUK) ¹¹ 'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³ The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. ¹⁴ 'I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me – ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep.

Jesus also led by example demonstrating acts of humble service such as feet washing - and that brings us to the focus of Peters instruction to all of us - leaders and younger members of the church:

1 Peter 5:5

(NIVUK) ⁵ In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility towards one another, because, 'God opposes the proud, but shows favour to the humble.'

Peter emphasizes this with a quote from Proverbs quote 3:34 – also quoted by James in his letter (James 4:6-10).

An ancient truth we are being reminded of.

Compared with the face of God, the almighty creator of the world, and compared with God incarnate, seen as Jesus on earth (whom the wind and waves obeyed and who could heal with a word or a touch), our correct attitude is always one of humility:

1 Peter 5:6

(NIVUK) ⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

The word 'humility' or 'humble' comes from the Latin ['Humus'](#) – meaning "of the earth" - in other words - be grounded, be brought low to the earth – it is safe to be close to the floor - there is less far to fall.

Compared with Jesus Christ Son of God, whose authority we are all under, the correct response is to feel humbled – lower in rank - respectfully in awe!

Have you ever been in a position of authority, and fallen down, or even been humiliated? When I was a secondary school teacher, I had such an experience which is clearly etched on my memory:- it was my behaviour management practice to have a corner of the board where it said "time wasted." And if the class was slow to stop chatting and pay attention, I would point at that corner with my board pen. And, if needed, I would write up 1 min/2 mins...which then would be added to the lesson, therefore they would lose break/lunch time.

However, one day I arrived late to class (which itself was a humbling experience). I should have apologized to the class, but instead I rushed in shoved my hand in my bag to grab a board pen and point it at the board – only for the class to erupt into laughter. I looked up at the board to discover I had grabbed a tampon instead of a pen from my bag, and was pointing that up at the board in front of 30 16-year-olds! In that moment I came down to earth – it was humiliating.

Now Peter is not saying humiliate each other! We are to clothe ourselves in humility. That is, to choose humility as an attitude we wear. Our attitude towards each other should always be humble. That is, you should always think of others as a higher rank than yourself; more important than yourself; due more honour than yourself. Humble leadership means listening, recognising you may not always be right. Other opinions matter, everyone is precious.

Jesus saw all of us as more important than his own life – as worthy enough to die for – in a very humiliating way.

Are we ready to serve each other like that – humbly but willingly and eagerly ready to serve each other - eager to wash feet and change toilet rolls if needed?

But then the reason why in verse 6: we are under the mighty hand of God. Not to be crushed, but to be protected, and, if needed, to be lifted up. It is better to be lifted up by God than to be self-elevated and find there is far to fall.

Then we get the central verse of this whole passage:

1 Peter 5:7

(NIVUK) 7 Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

What a verse our generation needed to hear in our age of anxiety. As someone for whom leadership does bring with it its own anxieties, I am so thankful for this verse.

It is a re-writing of Psalm 55:22 -

Psalm 55:22

(NIVUK) 22 Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous be shaken.

I have always thought of this verse as in casting a net – something Peter would have done often. I imagine flinging my anxieties as far from me as possible onto Jesus, so I can no longer hold them, in the hope of pulling in a catch of his peace.

However, in preparing this sermon I thought about that word "Cast" - it is the Greek word [epiriptō \(ἐπιρίπτω\)](#).

And it's a word that's used in only one other place in the NT – when the disciples throw their coats onto the colt for Jesus to ride into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, Luke 19:35:

Luke 19:35

(NIVUK) 35 They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it.

This use of cast made me think about the other meaning as to cast something out of metal, to cast characters in a play or even to cast on/cast off in knitting. This kind of casting changes the shape of the thing. Just like how the coats would have changed shape when thrown onto the donkey, because would have taken the shape of the donkey.

What shape change might occur to your anxieties if you cast them onto to Jesus such that they took his shape?

Often when we compare our anxieties to the shape of the hope we have in Jesus – who has made a way for us to be adopted as children of God; who is our advocate in heaven; whose death has paid for all our wrong doings; who promised not only to be with us always, but to go ahead and prepare for us a room in heaven for our eternal life – then our anxieties – which are often born of our pride, or of our focus on worldly not eternal things – look different. Our anxieties shrink when compared to our Jesus shaped hope.

However we may picture that verse, or understand the word 'cast' - it is a verse to store in our hearts, to remember in our suffering times:

Cast all your anxiety on Him because he cares for you!

Even we as humble humans know that if you care for someone, you want to take their anxieties off them and wear them yourself if possible. I know that is how I have been this last couple of weeks with our son and his search for the right Uni place. I have been wearing his anxiety, if not for him then with him. So it is with Jesus, he cares for you and he wants to take on or take away or reshape and shrink your anxieties.

Then Peter reminds us to be alert and watchful again, and he describes the devil as being like a roaring Lion looking for someone to devour.

1 Peter 5:8

(NIVUK) ⁸ Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

Why does he use this imagery? Is it an echo of shepherding again? Is it a reminder of David the shepherd boy, who learned to defend his flock from Lions and bears using a slingshot, such that later he had the courage and the faith in God to use the same skills to slay Goliath? Or was it because he was living in a time where Christians were fed to lions in the colosseum for entertainment as part of the emperor's persecution of this new threatening religious movement of Christ-followers?

Take the example of Ignatius of Antioch, a Bishop thrown to the lions by Emperor Trajan in AD 116 – some 50 years after Peter's letter was written, but a reality in Peter's lifetime.

This Lion imagery is meant to be arresting. To stick in your mind. To hold your attention. Peter is reminding us that the devil is real and dangerous and we must remain alert. A roaring lion though does somewhat give himself away. And Christ has conquered evil once and for all. So, when you hear the lions roar, stand firm in that knowledge and faith. Peter reminds his readers, (and therefore, us) that they are not alone. Christians around the world are also undergoing the same sufferings.

Peter ends by reminding us that our calling is an eternal one of **glory** in Christ - who will restore us...

1 Peter 5:10-11

(NIVUK) 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.

So, All Saints Weston, let us be like humble shepherds. Both in how we lead and in how we follow. Be willing and be eager to serve. There will be suffering on the road ahead. Be alert and watchful for the roaring lions. And know that the chief shepherd, Jesus, overseer of our souls, has conquered the evil one and cares for you, and you can cast all your anxieties on Him.

God's mighty hand protects us and lifts us up, and when the chief shepherd Jesus returns, we will receive crowns of glory that never fade and be restored, strong, firm and steadfast by the grace of God.

Closing Prayer

Thank you for Peter, the rock on which you built your church. Thank you for his words to feed and care for us your sheep and lambs gathered here. Guard all our leaders that they may be faithful shepherds of those entrusted to their care.

Holy Spirit give us courage to truly cast all our anxieties onto Jesus and keep us firmly fixed **on** our eternal crowns of Glory through all our suffering days.

Amen.



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