

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity, October 14, 2012

✠ ✠ ✠

(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 493, 482:1, 496, 488, 489.

Lessons: Psalm 23, 1 Timothy 3:1-12, Matthew 9:35 – 10:4.

Sermon Text: 1 Peter 5:1-4.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltritt

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

These verses have been called “an exhortation to pastors”. But they are much more. These words serve as an appeal, as encouragement for every Christian leader, every leader in a Christian congregation.

We begin today with a brief discussion of the priesthood of all believers and the public ministry. Peter told his hearers that they were a **“royal priesthood”** (2:9), that every person in the world who, through faith, has received Christ as his Savior, is a priest before God the Father in heaven and may, because of the reconciliation worked by Christ, approach directly to the Throne of Grace, offer the sacrifices of prayer and praise, and be certain of a merciful hearing on the part of God. Christ, our Mediator perfected forever that relation between God and men by which the believers are a great band of priests before Him.

As royal priests, then, all Christians have all the blessings and all the rights which Christ earned for His Church with His blood. They have the grace of God in Christ Jesus. They have the means of grace, the Gospel and the Sacraments, for their own use as well as for application to others. They have the office of the keys, the power to forgive and to retain sins, every Christian possessing the right to apply the Word of God for these two purposes. Christians have the obligations as well as the privileges of praying to God, of offering to Him the sacrifices of the heart, the lips, and the hands.

It is true, of course, that the universal priesthood of believers does not take the place of and does not encroach upon the office of the public ministry. It is God’s order that gatherings of Christians should exercise the public functions of their priesthood through certain men, elected or appointed to that office by their fellow Christians. In the home the functions of the priesthood are exercised through the housefather and, under some circumstances, through the housemother. In case of necessity, also, the Sacrament of Baptism may be administered by any Christian, regardless of sex. But under normal conditions, the public administration of the means of grace, preaching before the assembled congregation, instructing the catechumens and other inquirers after the truth, performing the work of taking heed to the entire congregation, administering the Sacraments publicly and privately, is the work of the minister, or pastor, whom the congregation calls. But this office of the public ministry does not abolish the general priesthood of the members of the congregation. It is they who put men into office as preachers and teachers. It is they who watch over the pure proclamation of the Word of God. It is they who in time of need discharge the duties of the office freely and gladly. If these facts are kept in mind, there will be neither presumption on the part of the church-members nor pride on the part of the pastors.

Peter in these verses is especially addressing

LEADERS IN THE CHURCH

- 1. They are to be shepherds of God’s flock.**
- 2. They are not to be self-serving,**
- 3. But are to be examples to the flock.**

Luther wrote “though all of us are priests, we may and should not on that account all preach or teach and govern. However, from the whole congregation some must be selected and chosen to whom this office is to be

committed; and whoever holds this office is now, because of it, not a priest, (like all the rest), but a servant, or minister of all the others. ...This office is nothing more than a public service, which is delegated to one by the whole congregation, though all of them are priests together”.

He goes on: “But because all have the privilege (that is, the priesthood of all believers), it becomes necessary that one, or as many as the congregation pleases, be chosen and elected, who in the stead and in the name of all, who have the same right, ministers these offices publicly, in order that no revolting disorder arise among God’s people and the Church be turned in to a babel, seeing that all things should be done decently and in order in it, as the Apostle has taught in 1 Corinthians 14:40.”

We find in our text encouragement for serving the Lord. These words apply especially for the called shepherds, but they can properly be applied to elders – a very specific word which doesn’t just mean “older ones” – but teachers, leaders, and even heads of the Christian households. These are especially inspiring words for preparing pastors for their roles as called servants.

Those who lead should be elders, not necessarily that they have to be old, but that they are experienced, trained, and respected as to their God-pleasing lives. They are shepherds, which points to their responsibilities in how well the sheep are doing, being fed, protected, and guided. They are overseers. They have been entrusted with a spiritual responsibility and spiritual authority.

Scripture uses a number of different words for leaders in the church, who have been called by God through their fellow believers to positions of leading, teaching, guiding, and authority. But their authority is such as to be one of ***“not lording it over those entrusted to”*** their spiritual care.

It is hard to visualize these words as coming from one who is claimed to be the first pope. The Roman Catholic church claims Peter was the first bishop of Rome, the first pope. These words and attitude from Peter show total service. They do not show someone grandly parading in elaborately fine robes, or claiming authority as Christ’s vicar on earth, or making and administering rules for all Christians on earth. Peter’s humility is far from the role claimed by the man in Rome who also claims to be Peter’s spiritual descendant as a leader lording it over all Christendom. It is hard to recognize the papacy and many of the men who have served as popes really following Peter’s humility and attitude of serving God’s flock.

The New Testament uses a number of different words for leaders in the church, for leaders in the local congregations. We find three of them here in the New International Version: elders – presbyters is the English form of the Greek word, – shepherds, and overseers. Thus we see that there is no one divinely ordained form or organization for a Christian congregation and for those who serve it. Principles are clear in Scripture, but Christians even today are free to give divine calls to people with the appropriate qualifications to serve them. Peter calls himself an “elder”, as did the apostle John.

Peter also uses the picture of a shepherd: ***“Feed the flock of God which is among you”*** (King James Version) ***“Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseer.”*** Our Old Testament lesson is a most beautiful picture of shepherding. The leaders – we especially use the word “pastor” – are to shepherd Christ’s flock, that is, to do everything that shepherding requires.

Then Peter uses the word “overseer” which has taken on the meaning of “bishop”. Bishop as commonly used today, and as used since the early centuries of the New Testament refers to one who is an overseer, or supervisor of pastors. No doubt there were many who were recognized as bishops, or leaders of pastors because of their God-given gifts, gifts of administration, or of serving, or of leading. But there were also many who, because of their desire to have power or authority, did everything they could to set themselves up as leaders, perhaps playing the game of “politics” in the church so that they could be recognized as important men. Even in Luther’s day, the office of a bishop was sold to one offering the greatest amount of money to the Roman Catholic Church.

In the hierarchy of some churches today, the word bishop refers to a leader in the church hierarchy. In the Roman Catholic Church a bishop is the head over the churches and all its priests in a geographical area, such as “the bishop of the diocese of New Ulm”. The next level up is “archbishop”. Even some Lutherans have adopted the word for its hierarchy. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), for example, no longer calls its leader the “president” of the church body, but the “presiding bishop”. But the New Testament instituted no such hierarchy which must be observed by all Christians. Christians are free to organize their

churches as is appropriate, remembering to do all things ***“decently and in order”*** (1 Corinthians 14:40) When Jesus called the 12 in our gospel lesson today, he instituted the office of the New Testament public ministry.

Those whom Peter addresses here have no doubt suffered the kind of persecution Peter often wrote about in this letter, for the leaders of an organization are often the most visible and first persecuted. He writes ***“as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed.”*** Although Peter didn't actually see all of Christ's sufferings, he was with him in Gethsemane to see some of that part of Christ's sufferings. He doesn't elevate himself above the other elders in these churches, but presents himself as an equal. But he reminds them where their persecutions and sufferings on earth will lead them: they are to partake of Christ's glory. That glory in heaven far outweighs any persecution here on earth.

Peter, speaking God's Words, gives three special qualifications here as warnings to those ***“serving as overseers--not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.”***

They are to serve willingly, not being forced to serve.

They are not to be greedy for money. The King James Version is especially graphic here. Leaders in the church are to serve ***“willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind.”*** Filth is shameful. Leaders in the church are not to serve just for money or wealth. But instead they are to be ***“eager to serve.”*** Peter is not here speaking of the importance of believers providing a living for servants in the church, but warning the servants not to do it just for the money, or to be begging for more money. They are to serve willingly, ***“as God wants [them] to be,”*** not just because it is a job or an income.

They are not to be ***“lording it over those entrusted to”*** them. They are not to be dictators or demanding bosses, insisting on of all sorts of things. Of course, there is one thing they must insist upon, and that is the Word of God in its truth and purity.

Peter also says they are to be ***“examples to the flock.”*** If you have worked for or served under a good leader, you know that a really good leader is just that – he leads – he doesn't send his workers or subordinates to do something he wouldn't do himself. Especially in the church the leaders are to be examples, not only for the church, but for those outside the church, as you heard in our epistle lesson.

There is much more that could be said here, but we just don't have time today to say it all.

As I studied these words, I could plainly see my own shortcomings as an elder, a shepherd, an overseer of Christ's flock. But I ask your forgiveness for my sins, too.

In addition, I remind you, as I have since my first sermon at Christ Our Redeemer in 1983, that you are to ***“Search the scriptures”***. (John 5:39) I want you to do this not only for yourselves, but to help keep me on the straight and narrow way of the truth of all of Scripture. It is only with God's help and your help that I can accomplish what is the will of God and what you pray be done when you pray “Thy will be done” to our Lord, the chief shepherd of the sheep.

It is him, Jesus Christ, whom we all serve, all as royal priests in his kingdom, some as heads of Christian households, some as teachers of Christ's will, some as healers, some as fervent pray-ers, some as musicians, some as elected or appointed officers or committee members with different titles defined by our congregations – elders, trustees, chairmen, secretaries, treasurers, and as pastor.

After all, we all have this promise awaiting fulfillment: ***“And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.” “Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.”*** (Revelation 22:12-13) ***“He who testifies to these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.”*** (Revelation 22:20)