

**Victory Lutheran Church- Jacksonville, FL**

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**Worship Series: Unleashed—God’s Words Possess God’s Power**

**Service Theme: *Christ Provides Ministers to Proclaim God’s Powerful Word***

**Sermon Theme: *The Shepherd’s Shepherds Shepherd the Shepherd’s Sheep* (July 3, 2022)**

**1 Peter 5:1-4**

So, this is a little awkward. At least, it could be. That is, being the pastor on a Sunday that’s all about the importance of pastors. I mean, imagine going to work, and having to give everyone a 20-minute presentation on why your job is really important, and why people should respect and listen to you. That’s a little awkward, right? And since the Apostle Peter addresses the verses of our sermon text specifically to pastors, you who aren’t pastors might think you can just take a little 20-minute siesta.

But interestingly, God inspired Peter to include this focused encouragement for pastors right in the middle of this letter, written to and intended to be read to all the Christians in those churches. That means Peter, and ultimately God, wanted all believers to hear what he had to say to the pastors, not just the pastors!

So, what is God teaching us by letting us listen in on Peter’s encouragements to pastors? He teaches us that **The Shepherd’s Shepherds Shepherd the Shepherd’s Sheep.**

That’s what Peter encouraged these elders-- basically, the equivalent of a pastor today—to do! ***“Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them.”***

Jesus used that visual often, calling himself The Good Shepherd, and his followers, his sheep. After his Resurrection, Jesus gave Peter the same command that Peter now gives these pastors, ***“Take care of my sheep.”*** That’s actually where the term “pastor” comes from, Latin for

“shepherd.” And to think of a shepherd helps us remember what God wants pastors to be and do.

What do shepherds do for their sheep? They lead their sheep to food and water. They protect their sheep from harm. They go after their sheep who have gotten lost or wandered away from the flock. And they lead their sheep safely home to the security of the sheep pen.

Sheep need shepherds to do those things for them, because sheep aren’t very strong or fast to defend themselves from predators. And sheep aren’t very smart, so they easily wander off and get lost. So, out of love for his sheep, the owner makes sure there are shepherds to care for them.

And in love, God sends spiritual shepherds to do the same things for his spiritual sheep. As Paul writes in Ephesians, ***“It was [God] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers.”*** God gives pastors to feed and nourish the faith of his sheep with the spiritual food and water of God’s Word, and the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. God calls pastors to protect his sheep from spiritual harm, warning against and pointing out dangerous false teaching and deadly sinful mindsets and actions. God calls pastors to seek after his sheep when they’ve wandered off in false teaching, unbelief, or sin. And God calls pastors to lead, encourage, and guide his flock safely home to the eternal security of heaven’s sheep pen!

But over the last decade or so, there’s been an increased desire in our culture for spiritual autonomy and independence. Maybe you’ve heard people declare, “I’m spiritual, just not religious.” Which basically means, “I want to be completely in charge of my spiritual life, without organized religion, or a church, or a pastor having any say in it.”

And I think we can understand that. We all have an innate desire to be in control of our lives, and do it all ourselves. My 6-year old daughter reminds me of that often. She’s growing increasingly independent, which is great, so she wants to do everything herself—like pour her own milk. But sometimes, the gallon is full, and as much as she wants

to do it herself, it's simply too heavy for her to pour without spilling milk everywhere, and Mom or Dad have to help.

God knows the same is true in our spiritual lives. As much as we might desire spiritual autonomy and independence, the powerful enemies fighting against us make our spiritual lives too heavy to carry alone. Just a few verses after our sermon text, Peter warns, ***“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”*** That's an informative visual, isn't it? Lions watch and wait until one of their prey gets separated from the herd, and then they attack! So, alone is vulnerable.

And internally, our sinful nature loves to believe Satan's lies, because he spins them to fit our personal sinful agendas and desires.

And externally, Satan attacks with the unbelieving world through persecution, cultural movements, and mindsets that seek to pull us away from Christ. In this letter, Peter builds up these Christian churches as they faced persecution for their faith. So Peter also points out that God calls pastors to feed and strengthen his flock with Word and Sacrament, so they can stand firm against such attacks, and to counter Satan's lies by proclaiming God's truth! God sends pastors to help protect his sheep from the dangers of spiritual autonomy!

And while we often visualize shepherds caring for their flocks in peaceful, serenity, shepherding is anything but peaceful. Shepherd's staffs were designed for messy work! The hard, thick staff served as a weapon for deadly combat with attacking predators. And the long hook allowed the shepherd to reach out and grab a wandering sheep around the neck, and drag it away from danger. I doubt that was always a gentle action. If a sheep was about to fall off a cliff, the shepherd couldn't slowly, gently pull them back to safety. That probably didn't feel very good on a sheep's neck. But even if it came with pain, wasn't the shepherd using that hook out of loving concern for the sheep's life?

Like Ezekiel, God calls pastors to speak God's truth, regardless of how people react. Sometimes in love, pastors have to tell their flock things

they don't like to hear, which might be painful, or frustrating. When that happens, Satan will try to convince you you'd be better off spiritually autonomous, leaving behind the church and the spiritual oversight of your pastor, to do your own thing. But please, understand the danger of a sheep wandering off alone. Understand that when pastors have to sting you with God's law, they do so from a place of sincere love and concern for your eternal soul, to shepherd you with God's powerful Word!

That's why being a pastor isn't a normal, 9-5 job. Because Satan, our sinful nature, and this sinful world don't just attack during business hours! As your pastor, I want you to take this to heart! If you're struggling with something spiritually, please don't think, “I don't want to bother him,” or “He's too busy.” Please contact me, any time, day or night, because that's what God has called me to do as your pastor, your spiritual shepherd!

But many people don't trust clergy. Accounts of pastors and priests committing sexual abuse or financial fraud have understandably soured many from entrusting their spiritual care to a pastor. Can we know if a pastor is trustworthy?

God despises it when pastors misuse their position to abuse people, or empty pockets for their own personal gain instead of shepherding his flock. And that's why he's given direction to help separate godly spiritual shepherds from wolves in shepherd's clothing.

Peter lays it out through contrasting negative pastoral attitudes and motivations with godly pastoral attitudes and motivations. He tells these pastors, ***“Be shepherds...not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be.”*** Is the pastor shepherding the flock out of compulsion, or with Gospel motivation? Is he only doing the base minimum requirement to keep collecting a paycheck, viewing it as a job instead of a calling? Or is he faithfully shepherding the flock with his best efforts, because he loves God, and loves those sheep, who Peter says have been, ***“entrusted to you.”***

We pastors might call it “our flock,” but it’s really God’s flock that’s been entrusted to our care! That means pastors are “under-shepherds” of the Good Shepherd! And knowing that should profoundly affect the way a pastor cares for the sheep!

Think how differently you’d approach dog sitting if you were caring for the Queen of England’s award-winning, purebred, compared to caring for your neighbor’s mutt? Who values that animal makes a major difference in how valuable you think caring for them is! Knowing that the sheep belong to the Good Shepherd should lead a pastor to willingly, joyfully, carefully shepherd them!

And Peter instructs, “***Not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve.***” Again, what’s the pastor’s motivation? To line his pockets and retire early with a huge house, yacht, and personal jet? Now, Jesus instructed the disciples, “***The worker deserves his wages,***” so it’s not wrong for a pastor to collect a paycheck. But is that their end goal? Is greed their main motivation for shepherding the flock? That shepherd will always put God and flock second, and serve money first!

Finally, Peter encourages, “***Not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.***” No question, God has given authority to these spiritual shepherds. But does the pastor shepherd the flock like a dictator? Or like a servant? Does he serve the flock? Or expect to be served by it? Does he seek to benefit others? Or expect everyone to benefit him? Is it “my way or the highway?” Or does he listen to the opinions and needs of the flock? Does he lead by example, and practice what he preaches? Or just tell everyone what to do, himself excluded?

By allowing everyone to listen in on his direction for pastors, God shows us what kinds of shepherds you should entrust with your spiritual care. Shepherds who put God, his truth, and his flock first in their teachings and actions, not shepherds who put themselves first in their teachings and actions.

I pray that I can always be that kind of pastor for you, and always point you to Jesus with my words and my actions. But I know I’m a

sinner. Sometimes, I’m more greedy than gracious; more self-serving than selfless; more lazy than eager. And if I’ve ever hurt you, or your walk with God through that, I ask you and God for forgiveness. All pastors are sinners too, so we won’t always shepherd perfectly.

And that’s why it’s important for pastors to be first in line to lead their flock to the cross, because we need to go there as much as anyone. Join me in daily laying our sins at the feet of the Chief Shepherd, repentantly confident that he has paid for them all.

That’s my goal as a pastor, and my confidence as your pastor. As Peter encourages, “***When the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.***” It is my goal to do everything I can to continue feeding you with Word and Sacrament, so that by faith, you may always remain connected to him who has won for you the eternal crown of glory. That’s the end goal, isn’t it? When the Chief Shepherd, our Savior Jesus returns, side by side, the Shepherd’s shepherd and the Shepherd’s sheep will side-by-side receive the crown of glory that will never fade away!

It’s my prayer that we can continue growing together; through worship, and Bible Study, and serving. It’s my prayer that I have earned your trust to see me as your spiritual shepherd. In 3 years, there’s still room to grow. But I’d love to be able to do that together!

I want you to know how richly blessed I and my family are to be able to serve God, and you here at Victory and in Jacksonville. We love you, more than we could possibly explain. And I pray that God will give me the strength to show that love, and more importantly, his love to you, until the Chief Shepherd comes with those crowns of glory.