Be Shepherds of God’s Flock

1 Peter 5:1-14

Key Verse: 5:2a “Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care.”

Two weeks ago, we had an achievement ceremony for two Wash U graduating students, Tim Chung and Carsen Codel, who had finished studying the gospel books. We prayed for Tim to be a shepherd doctor and Carsen a shepherd lawyer. In today’s passage Peter, as a shepherd of the church, concluded his first letter by urging them to become shepherds of God’s flock. What does ‘being a shepherd’ mean to them and to us? Today’s passage gives us an answer and teaches us what ‘being shepherds of God’s flock’ mean.

First, be shepherds of God’s flock (1-4) Today we have many diverse job and professional positions, but in Peter’s day there were not many but simple things such as farming, fishing, shepherding, building, and so on. Peter was a fisherman before he was called to Jesus. But Jesus asked him to be a shepherd, a shepherd of God’s sheep. A fisherman catches fish in water whereas a shepherd feeds sheep in a field. How could a fisherman become a shepherd? What Jesus meant to Peter has deeper meaning than simply talking about occupation. After Jesus died on the cross, he rose again from the dead. Before he died, he predicted to his disciples to meet them at the Sea of Galilee. As he had said, Jesus visited them while they were fishing at the sea. They cast their nets all night, but caught nothing. They were tired and hungry. More than their physical exhaustion, despair and sense of failure as disciples made them more difficult to bear. This is because they all ran away when Jesus was crucified. But Jesus visited them as he had promised and restored their failure by letting them catch lots of fish. Jesus even prepared breakfast and invited them to eat. After eating with them, Jesus asked Peter if he loved him more than anything else. Peter answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus asked him, “Feed my lambs.” Jesus asked the same questions two more times and Peter answered the same answers as well. (Jn 21:15-17) Since then, Peter became a shepherd of Jesus’ sheep. He became a shepherd of Jesus’ sheep until he was martyred by the Romans while he was in Rome.

Peter sent the same message to the suffering Christians, especially to the elders of the church. Look at verses 1-3. “***To the elders among you,  I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ’s sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them–not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being example to the flock.***” We define the role of a shepherd in three ways: Provision, protection, and guidance. We learn these three roles from David’s psalm, Psalm 23. David calls the LORD a shepherd. David knew well what a shepherd is because he was a shepherd before he became a king of Israel. “*The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing*.” David called God his shepherd because God provided and guided him. He continues, “*He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name’s sake*.’ (Ps 23:1-3) The shepherd God also protected David. “*Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*” (Ps 23:4) David’s psalm was his life testimony. Indeed, the LORD God was David’s shepherd. For example, God protected David from his enemies as an apple of his eyes. God also rebuked David to repent of his sin of adultery so that David might refresh his soul and go to the right path of God.

Peter was not a shepherd like David, but a fisherman. But he learned from Jesus who the good shepherd is and what shepherds have to do for their sheep. Shepherds are those who care for their sheep. I watched a video about the life of a shepherd in Central Asia. A shepherd always watches over his sheep. He found that one of his sheep would not eat a meal. The sheep did not get along with other sheep, either. The shepherd took him out and checked why the sheep would not eat and didn’t get along with others. Soon the shepherd found that the sheep was ill. The sheep received proper treatment and recovered soon. Jesus said in John 10:14 that I know my sheep and my sheep know me. The good shepherd knows his sheep. The good shepherd knows when his sheep get up and lie down, how they eat, where they go, what they really like. A shepherd cares for his sheep.

Jesus said, *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”* (Jn 10:11) Jesus is the good shepherd for us. As he said, he laid down his life on the cross for our sins. He delivered us from the hand of Satan by his death and resurrection. Peter called Jesus the Chief Shepherd in verse 4.

What does “be shepherd of God’s flock” mean to us today? I asked my Bible students to become a shepherd doctor and a shepherd lawyer. I will ask others to become a shepherd professor, a shepherd nurse, a shepherd officer, and so on. A shepherd doctor is not a doctor who cares only for the physical body, but also for the soul. A shepherd doctor is the one who really prays for the patient’s soul and prays to God for healing. A shepherd lawyer is the one who practices justice and mercy for his clients based on good conscience. A shepherd professor is the one who teaches not only worldly knowledge, but also the truth of God. There is a Christian nurse whom I know. She is a shepherd nurse. So many people around her like her, especially her patient families who received genuine care and love from her. Likewise, we can be shepherds of God’s sheep anywhere, anytime, and for anybody. I pray for all of us to be shepherds of God’s flock. Amen!

Who can be shepherds of God’s sheep? Anyone who loves Jesus and obeys his command can be a shepherd. Jesus did not ask Peter’s job or age or school before he commanded him to be a shepherd. He asked Peter if he loved Jesus or not. Therefore, all who love Jesus regardless of their race, age, gender, occupation, can be shepherds of God’s sheep. We are limited to care for others with our own will and strength because we are born selfish. But when we are filled with the love of Christ, we feed Jesus’ sheep and feed them. The love of Christ compels us to even lay down our lives for Jesus’ sheep as Jesus did. Do you really love Jesus? Feed his sheep. Amen!

Before I was called to be a shepherd, I was one of the lost sheep who was wandering in darkness without knowing any meaning and direction of life. My soul and body were bruised and drained by my sin of lust, selfishness, and emptiness. Jesus found me when I was walking through the valley of death. Then, he showed me how he loved me and died for me on the cross. Filled with joy and gratitude and moved by his love, I responded to his question, “Do you love me? Paul. Feed my sheep!” I decided to become a shepherd of God’s sheep, especially college students who are wandering in the darkness of sin. It has been almost forty years since I became a shepherd of Jesus’ sheep. God’s call and my decision are still valid and will be continued. Praise Jesus who has been with me and cared for me for the last 40 years! I pray that Jesus may continue to use me as a shepherd of Jesus’ sheep, especially college students. Amen!

Second, cast your anxiety on Jesus (5-7) In the Garden of Eden when Satan tempted the woman, Satan used a strong weapon against her, which is ‘pride’. Satan tempted her saying, “you will be like God!” if she eats the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (Ge 3:5) Pride made her disobey God’s command. Satan was also dispelled from heaven because it wanted to be like God. So, Peter quoted Proverbs 3:34 to urge young people to be humble, “*God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.*” Muhamad Ali, who was known as the greatest boxer of all time, became a world champion when he was 21 years old. Once he took a plane and was asked to take a seatbelt by a stewardess before the plane took off. The young and proud Ali said, “I am a Superman. Superman does not need to take a seatbelt.” The stewardess said to Ali politely, “Yes, sir! But a superman does not need to take a plane.” The young lady humbled the proud Ali. Let us read verses 5-6. “***In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.” Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.***”

Now let us read verse 7. “***Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.***” Anxiety does not choose age. Whether we are young or old, we become anxious about something. I know a young man who was 11 years old at that time became anxious about his future. Anxiety continues until we have our last breath on this earth. Peter must have become more anxious about his life than any other disciples because he had a family. When he was called, he had already been married. He was a poor fisherman who had to support his family, and his mother-in-law easily got sick. But he left everything to follow Jesus. He cast all his anxiety on Jesus because he believed that Jesus would care for him. Let us read verse 7 again. We cannot handle anxiety by our own strength. The more we try to handle anxiety, the more difficult it becomes. When we become anxious, anxiety does not reduce half, but increases double. This is the reason Jesus said, “*Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life*?” (Mt 6:27) So, you must cast your anxiety on whom? Yes! On Jesus!  Jesus said, “*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*” (Mt 11:28-30) Paul said in Philippians 4:6-7, “*Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*” Here we learn that casting our anxiety on Jesus means presenting our request to God by prayer and petition. “*All because we do not carry, Everything to God in prayer*!” Peter did not ask us to *put down* our anxiety, but *cast* all on Jesus. Let us practice for ‘*cast*’. Amen!

Third, resist the devil (8-11) The devil always threatens us with anxiety and tries to shake our faith. Look at verses 8-9. “***Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.***” In *Pilgrim’s Progress*, two companions of Christians, Timorous and Mistrust, went back home when they saw a roaring lion which threatened them on the way to the City of God. We often lose our heart and become fearful when anxiety attacks like a roaring lion. The lion seems to devour us at any moment. But the lion is chained. It is like a paper tiger which cannot harm us. It just threatens us. So, we must resist anxiety and cast it out onto Jesus.

Let us read verses 10-11. “***And the God of all peace, 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. To him be the power for ever and ever.*** Amen!  In these verses we learn two things. First, Jesus will restore us. Christianity is not only for our salvation, but also for our restoration. Jesus came to save and to restore. In the book of prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, God promised the restoration of Israel after the exile for 70 years. Likewise, God will restore his people after they go through hardships and sufferings for a little while. We will suffer a little while, not forever. And after a little while we'll be restored. The Psalmist sang the day of restoration in this, “*When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, “The LORD has done great things for them.*” (Ps 126:1-2) Amen! Second, our present sufferings have meaning and purpose. Through these sufferings and hardships God makes us strong, firm, and steadfast so that we can grow in the divine nature of Jesus Christ. (2 Pe 1:4)

Peter concludes his first letter with warm greetings in verses 12-14. Peter sends his greetings to the suffering Christians with Silas and Mark, who is also known as John Mark. Peter blessed them with a message of peace by saying, “***Peace to all of you who are in Christ.***” (14) Jesus said to his anxious disciples, “*Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me.*” (Jn 14:1) “*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*” (Jn 14:27) Therefore cast all your anxiety on Jesus who will care for you. Amen!