

Texts: 1 Peter 5:1-14; Matthew 20:25-28

Subject: Tending the Flock of God

Theme: Sit Down, Be Humble

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost, August 7, 2022; Living Hope Lutheran, Las Vegas, NV

Grace and peace to you from God our Father in heaven, and our risen Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I've been reading about the history of Wartburg Seminary,¹ the place where I was trained and prepared for ministry. Are we ever really prepared? Equipped in many ways, certainly. The institution began in 1852, after a midwest circuit rider - a pastor who would go town to town preaching, wrote a letter to church leaders in Bavaria asking for more pastors. By 1855, a couple of brothers named Fritschel had come from Neuendettelsau, Germany, in their early twenties to be teachers of theology. They lived and worked in small towns in Iowa, Illinois, and Michigan, where students also lived and worked and studied together to build up the community. From humble beginnings, they created a legacy that lives on today. If you ever take a trip to Dubuque, Iowa, you can visit the castle there. Maybe a castle on top of a hill doesn't seem very humble, but the people there are the definition of the word. They live and work and serve together. The tradition of caring for the campus continues, every spring the week before graduation as students and faculty come together to pull weeds, plant flowers, and place mulch, and of course have a BBQ. When I think back to my time there, I remember my professors as caring and humble, among them Dr. Ann Fritschel, a descendant of those founding brothers, who taught us the Hebrew Bible with humor and patience. Dr. Fritschel, like so many seminary instructors is a prolific author, with over 15 published works over the last two decades. Passionate about service and leadership, I have fond memories of when

¹ Nesson, Craig. *The Air I Breathe is Wartburg Air: The Legacy of William Weiblen* (Eugene, Wipf and Stock) 2003.

she accompanied a group of us on a rural ministry outing where we milked cows, and stayed overnight with farming families in northern Illinois. That will keep you humble. She retired from teaching last spring, and will be remembered fondly by countless church leaders for years to come.

This last chapter of Peter's letter commands these qualities to the early church community in Asia minor, reminding them that they are to live and work together to build up the community in Christ. The elders are to serve with wisdom as leaders, but not to "lord it over those in [their] charge," but to make room for younger generations to grow and learn. They are to be gentle like shepherds, tending the flock, and are to be respected, but to show the grace of God to one another. The younger ones are to recognize and respect those ahead of them, but must use the gifts that God has given them to care for the community. It's a good model for us too, and a reminder to *sit down, and be humble*.

Humility seems hard to come by in our culture, hard to see in most public figures. Maybe we can think of a few, like Jimmy Carter, who has been in the news these days. In *his* first term as president he dealt with high gas prices and rising inflation, similar to issues we are facing today. But when I think of Jimmy Carter, who was president when I was born, I think of the servant leader, who built homes with habitat for humanity, and still teaches Sunday school at his church into his late 90's. It was one of the criticisms he received in his career, that he failed to promote his success. Today, his faith and dedication to service still lead him to be a humble servant for God.

I have a pretty healthy ego. My wife will tell you. But I try not to think *too* much of myself, and to let whatever gifts God has given me be used to the sake of the people

around me. I think that's healthy. We all have gifts and we can and should be proud of our accomplishments. We know that every good gift that we have comes from God. When we are humble, we can know that what we have been given is not ours to hoard or to be used to put others down, but for the sake of our family, our community and our neighbors, and we are on the right track.

Peter lifts up the example of Christ who humbled himself, and suffered and died on the cross for the whole world, to redeem us - to make us one with him. Peter's letter reminds us that we are still a part of that holy community. What we have is to be shared, how we live is to be for others, and who we are as followers of Christ makes us one body, not independent, but interdependent, belonging to a greater whole. We are to "clothe ourselves with humility in our dealings with one another."

We are often tempted to think that we got here all on our own, by the sweat of our brow, and pulled ourselves up by our bootstraps. We say things like, "God helps those who help themselves" (That's not in the Bible, people.) And even though it might feel like it at times, you are not alone. Think back on your life for just a minute, and try to remember all the people who showed up for you, who taught you and listened to you, who walked with you and welcomed you. Maybe there were many, or maybe just one or two. But, you didn't get here on your own. You belong to a community that exists with you and you exist to be a part of that group. We remember where we came from, and everyone here has had to overcome some obstacles in life, things that have humbled us, relationships that have changed us, goals that we didn't achieve, or ones we did with help from others around us, that have moved us beyond selfish pride, and

reminded us that we belong together. I hope that is one thing we've learned from going through a two-plus year pandemic. We need each other.

The kids were at grandma's house Sunday night, and Ivy was working Monday, and as I wondered what I would do with myself, I remembered I needed to make a phone call. Yes, my number was called, and it was my turn. I showed up at the regional justice center for jury duty Monday morning, on my day off. From 8am to 5pm I lined up with the group, sat and listened to instructions from the judge and the attorneys as the jury selection began. I was there Tuesday morning as well, wondering if I would be chosen for the panel of what was expected to be a two week civil trial revolving around a motor vehicle accident. I was planning out my week in my head trying to figure out how I would get my work done, get kids to and from school, and what would need to be adjusted if I was called to serve. Others in the group huffed and puffed and made excuses about why they couldn't make a fair and impartial decision, or explained their own injuries from car accidents that might prevent them from serving. Tuesday, just before lunch, they called up the guy sitting next to me to replace one of the potential jurors who was dismissed. Had they let one more go, I was next up. But they got what they needed, and I was off the hook. It was a learning experience, and I'll know what to expect for next time - and you can bet there will be more chances to serve.

One of the first things they did Monday morning, after we were corralled into a room, and checked in, and given parking validation - very important - was to swear in the group. If you've served on a jury you have heard it go something like this:

“Do you and each of you solemnly swear that you will well and truly try and a true deliverance make between the United States and the defendant at the bar, and a true verdict render according to the evidence, so help you God?”

“So help you God.”

We need God's help. What can we do without it? It's the help of God our chief shepherd, who gives us “the crown of glory that need fades” that aids and empowers us in all we do, who knew us before we were born and who opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble - that we serve when we serve one another. And all our worries and fears, every anxiety gets handed over to him, this humble savior who holds the power of the whole universe in his hands, who defeated death itself for our sake, and who loves us no matter what that cares for us so much. God has knit us into one body, one with all the faithful across the earth, so that when one suffers we might be able to help. God has given us all gifts to be used to make a difference in the lives of the ones he calls us to, and each one we meet. Who is your neighbor? It's each one here and the first one you see when you leave this place.

We have so many opportunities to serve our neighbors. This is what we're for. We have been so many gifts from God, the greatest of all is the grace and forgiveness in Jesus, who's own ministry reflected humility and gentleness, service and love for the least among us. He is *our* Lord who does not Lord power *over us*, but has given his life, and gives us His own power of grace and mercy so that we might be of service to others. Amen.