

June 18, 2023  
Faith in Exile: Leading and Following  
1 Peter 5:1-5  
Vernon Advent Christian Church

I want to begin this morning by taking you back 25-30 years or so. For me, this would take me back to high school, for you it could be to a different time in your life. And for others, you weren't even born yet. I want to take you back to a time when computers were not in every home and the internet was still just a start up. When cell phones were very primitive and there was no such thing as text messaging. It makes you wonder how we ever were able to communicate back in the "old days." In fact, if you had to get ahold of someone you had to call them on the phone and if you didn't have their number memorized then chances are you had it written in a rolodex or, if you were like my family, it was written on the wall next to where the phone was plugged in. Another way to communicate was through writing notes and letters. For those of you who don't know about this archaic technology, it's where you take a pen or a pencil and a piece of paper and you hand write a message, usually in cursive, that most often needs an interpreter to be read. Some of my fondest memories growing up as a kid are when I would receive cards and letters from my Gram especially after my family moved away from our extended family in Maine. Whether it was my birthday, Valentines Day or even Earth Day, or Arbor Day, my Gram would send me and my sister cards and letters that would always need some interpretation from my mom. These letters would include what she had been doing, who she had bumped into in town and always the current weather as well as the forecast. And at the end of every letter there was always a "sign-off." Something to the affect of, "Well that's it for now, I have to go get some stuff done outside," or "I have to go into town and get some groceries." And she would always end each letter with "XOXO, Gram" which was old person shorthand for hugs and kisses.

Our theme is, and has been, Faith in Exile and we have been looking recently at Peter's first letter to believers in the early church who had been exiled for their faith and needed encouragement to keep up the good fight during their persecution and suffering for the cause of Christ. And this morning I want to remind us all that this was, in fact, a letter hand written from the Apostle Peter himself. Just like the letters I used to get from my Gram. The only difference, although I love my Gram very much, her words were not inspired and breathed out by God. Peter has written this letter to these believers with great concern for their spiritual well-being. He has walked them through some very deep things that we have looked into over the last couple months. The idea that suffering for doing what is right is inevitable for the Christian. That suffering for doing good should not cause us shame but gives glory and honor to Christ whose name we bear. That how we handle our suffering, and how we walk through times of great trial, is a witness to a world that is searching for hope even though they don't know it.

And now, Peter has come to the end of his letter, the "sign-off" if you will. How does he end it? What does he have to say to sum up his message to these believers and to us today? Well let's begin to take a look at the last chapter of Peter's first letter to the early church and see what God has to say to us today. If you are able, please stand with me as I read 1 Peter 5:1-5. [Read]

You may have heard it said somewhere, "Leaders lead and followers follow." Peter has said already in his letter, and we have reiterated, that "the body of Christ has no useless members," meaning everyone has been gifted by the Spirit of God and has a role to play and a

job to do. In times of suffering and trials, Peter is urging his readers to rely on the church body instead of keeping yourself from it. In Ch. 5, Peter moves from persecution and suffering to how the church should be fed and led during such times. In order to withstand suffering, a church needs loving leaders who have been called by God to tend and care for the flock and faithful followers who willingly submit themselves to the Godly leadership God has placed above them. When each person does his or her part, the kingdom of God is advanced. A few years ago, when the New England Patriots were actually good and winning Super Bowls, the team adopted the mantra “Do your Job...” which meant that no matter what type of adversity the team faced, whether it was injuries or something else that caused a player to miss a game, then the next person was expected to step into that role and as long as everybody “did their job” then they knew they had a good chance at winning. Without going into what specifically our individual giftings and jobs are within the church this morning, here Peter gives us what the church is supposed to look like with leaders who lead with humility and followers who humbly follow God’s appointed leaders. He gives us the requirements, the responsibilities, the reward of elders and then concludes with the response of the rest of the body.

First let’s look at the requirements. The first thing Peter establishes is that godly elders are to lead the church. Look at verse 1: “So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed.” The word, “exhort” means to “warn, counsel and encourage.” Peter wants to finish up his letter by writing a word of encouragement to the elders within the church. The word “elder” is the Greek word presbuteros, where the Presbyterians get their name from, and the word is used interchangeably to refer to different groups of people depending on the context. 1) Jewish elders. This is the primary use in the Old Testament and the Gospels, what we would refer to as the “office of Elder.” 2) Older men in general, someone who has reached a “ripe age.” 3) Elders in the Book of Revelation. We read in Revelation 4:4 that 24 elders are sitting on thrones around the throne of God. Here Peter is speaking directly to the office of Elder and those who function in an overseeing role within the church. Among the elders who oversaw the church were the teaching elders, which we call pastors today. So from here on out I will be using the term Elder/Pastor to refer to who Peter was addressing in these verses. Our church has Elders appointed by you the congregation (Al Goodwin, Jack Arensmeyer, and just recently appointed, Mark Braskie) and Pastor Bruce and I, as pastors, are a part of that elder team as teaching elders. Don’t tune out, as there is something to be said for applying this to any position of authority as well as to keep us accountable.

Notice that Peter says that the elders are “among you.” They are not to be high and lifted up and unapproachable but rather among you. Related to this, Peter refers to himself as a “fellow elder.” He doesn’t pull rank on the other leaders or flex his apostolic muscle. Even though he is an apostle, he refers to himself as a partner in ministry.

The main requirement for an elder is a close relationship with Christ. In Peter’s own experience, he was a “witness of the sufferings of Christ,” and also “a partaker of the glory to be revealed.” He was more than a fellow elder. He was an eyewitness to the Lord’s suffering. Being an eyewitness to the Lord is the foundation of his authority as an apostle. He saw how the Lord responded when He suffered at the hands of Romans and the corrupt Jewish leaders. In addition to that, he was a witness of Christ’s glory. What does this refer to? I think he is talking about the transfiguration here. The word “partaker” is usually used in the New Testament to refer to some kind of concrete experience, a first hand account if you will. This is the only place in the New Testament where it is used with the word “glory.” In Matthew 17 we read the story of when

Peter, along with James and John, went up on a mountain with Jesus and he was transfigured before them, meaning the veil of flesh was removed and they saw Jesus in this glorified state. But Peter recognized that his experience that day was only a glimpse of Christ's ultimate glory. Peter speaks of a glory that is "going to be revealed" when Jesus comes again and we all see him face to face. What a hope we have in Christ!

Peter next lists some of the responsibilities of elders/pastors in verses 2-3: [Read] We'll start with the three responsibilities and then move to the three warnings, or exhortations, for elders. The primary job of the elder/pastor is to shepherd, which is to care for and feed the sheep. Peter refers to the people as the "flock of God." It's interesting that Peter uses the same word here that Jesus spoke to him when he restored him to ministry after Peter had denied Christ in John 21:16: "Tend my sheep." This is not Pastor Bruce's church, or my church or even your church. It's God's church. God draws people to himself and we are merely under-shepherds, serving under the Good Shepherd Jesus. We are called to faithfully feed, care for, protect and, at times, correct the flock all while at the same time following God's leading on our own lives. We are to have the same attitude as Jesus is in Luke 12:32 when he turns to people filled with anxiety and says, "Do not fear, little flock."

After shepherding, or caring for the sheep, Peter moves to the next responsibility of an elder/pastor which is "exercising oversight." The word translated oversight is the word "episkopos." This word is also translated as "bishop" and is used interchangeably with elder. It has the idea of being a "watchman" or "guardian" and literally means "to gaze upon something." It has the idea of looking something over carefully. As such, elders and pastors need to see the big picture and also get down to the details. This makes me think of Proverbs 27:23: "Know well the condition of your flocks, and give attention to your herds." Peter's instruction here is that the elders need to be with their people. I don't agree with Pope Francis on a lot of things, but just recently he is quoted as saying to those who hold positions of authority within the church, "We are to be shepherds with the smell of sheep." How else are we to know the condition of the flock unless we are involved in the lives of our sheep. Now this is a two way street and we can only be involved as much as we are invited to be, but nevertheless, Peter lets it be known that part of the responsibility of being an elder/pastor is to exercise oversight over the flock.

The third, and final, responsibility of the pastor/elder is found in the last part of verse 3: "being examples to the flock." The elder/pastor must live above reproach and seek to be a good example for the flock. The word "example" is quite descriptive because it means "to strike, to leave a mark or an imprint." And it's in the present tense, meaning it involves everyday practice. This is a high calling, not to be taken lightly. It means, sometimes, making decisions in our personal lives that others do not have to make. It means living lives that inspire people to follow. When we see a good example it leaves a mark on us. We can probably all think of those people in our lives that made an impression on us today. How much more should these folks be our pastors and elders. The Apostle Paul said in 1 Cor. 11:1, Be followers, or imitators of me as I of Christ."

Now I want you to notice there are also three attitudes and actions Peter wants these elders to avoid while performing these responsibilities in these same verses. The first is to perform your duties "not by compulsion, but willingly." Serving the Lord should be our delight, not a duty. The idea here is that we "get to," not that we "have to." God doesn't want us to give our time grudgingly but cheerfully.

Next, these elders were to perform these responsibilities "eagerly" and "not for dishonest gain." The word "eager" means to have a strong and urgent desire, to be filled with zeal to serve.

During this time in the early church, it wasn't unheard of to have "false teachers," and others, come to town collecting money under false pretenses and some of the Apostles had been accused by their enemies as doing this as well. Peter's exhortation here is for the elder to leave no doubt in the minds of his people that he is serving the Lord out of love and not for any compensation.

Speaking of love, Peter's final exhortation to the elders in this passage is to love the flock and not domineering over them. The apostle Paul put it like this in 2 Corinthians 1:24: "Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith." An interesting word is used to describe the church that the elder leads. The phrase "those in your charge," is a single word that means that those who are under the elders care have been "entrusted" to him. In Deut. 9:29, this same word speaks of Israel being God's inheritance. An elder is to relate to his flock as those whom God has given to him as an inheritance. They are a gift from the Lord. The elder/pastor is not leading the church because of his gifts and charm, even though those are characteristics that are considered humanly speaking. But ultimately, the elder/pastor is leading the church because God gave him those people as an assignment to lead them to know Him and make Him known. Rather than being domineering and abusive, the elder should be an example of gentleness and care.

We've looked at the requirements and the responsibilities of the elder/pastor and now we see the reward mentioned in verse 4. [Read]

Peter reminds the elders that they serve under the Chief Shepherd, Jesus, and when He appears, those faithful under shepherds will be rewarded for their service with all the saints. What they will receive is a crown of glory. The "crown of glory" is the victor's crown that was a symbol of special honor. It was the only prize ancient Olympic runners received and was cherished as a great treasure. This is symbolic of the prize that is ours when Christ Jesus comes again. One day the pain will be gone, the tears will be no more and the tiredness will be replaced with us sharing in the unfading glory of the Lord Jesus. There is no accomplishment in ministry that can possibly rival what Jesus has in store for the elder/pastor who humbly and faithfully tends to the flock he has been assigned.

Up to this point we have seen Peter's exhortation to the elders of the church. Now verse 5 gives the expected response of the flock. "Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders..." The word "be subject" means to "place under in an orderly fashion" and was a military term describing troop divisions arranged under the authority of the leader. It's an attitude of respect and recognition. It's important to notice this is a command, to fall under God-appointed leadership that he has placed over them. Unfortunately, there have been pastors and elders that have abused their power and the willingness of the church to submit to their leadership. I would then point you back to Peter's command for the elder not to be domineering. But the point is, when everyone is operating as they have been commanded by God to do, when leaders are leading with humility and followers are following in humility, then the Church is unstoppable and can do great things for God. When either is out of order, either from the leaders or from the followers, the church becomes powerless.

"Clothe yourselves with humility..." To be "clothed with humility" is the picture of a slave putting on an apron before tackling his tasks. It literally means to tie something on oneself with a knot. Our model for this is found in John 13:4 when Jesus "took a towel and tied it around his waist" and then washed his disciples' feet. We are all to have the same attitude as Christ.

Verse 5 concludes with the reason the church is to submit to its leaders as we humbly serve each other: "...for 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'" Peter is quoting Proverbs 3:34. The word "resists" is very strong. It means "to set an army against" meaning that

God is continually against the arrogant. This word tells us God literally calls out His armies against the arrogant but He gives grace to those who see themselves as lowly. Grace is God's unmerited favor to undeserving sinners. Isaiah 57:15 says that God comes close to the humble: "For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite."

Brothers and sisters, let us remember that we have a gift from God that we don't give much thought to. Remember that Peter is writing to a group of people who are being severely persecuted for their faith. And as he's beginning to end his letter to these folks where does he instruct them to go to receive care and instruction during such times? To the church. God established the church to be his hands and feet to a world that is lost without a shepherd. Do not neglect that which God has freely given you. We have a wonderful group of elders here who seek to faithfully carry out the responsibilities of the elder that we looked at today. And I think I can speak for us all when I say, you can call us out if we ever get off track. At the same time, we all need to recognize that, especially in times of trial, we need to look to those in leadership who God has put in those positions to help guides us and to humbly follow their leading. This of course all requires, faith. Faith in exile.

Benediction from Hebrews 13:20-21 – "Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen."