**"Pastor" My Sheep**

Based on [John 21:1-19](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Jn21.1)

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Easter 3

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You've probably heard the old adage. "**Give a man a fish, feed him for a day; teach a man to fish, feed him for a lifetime**." The problem is that it usually takes a lifetime to learn how to fish, or I mean to do it well enough to live on. **Anyone can drop a line in the water and get lucky...and it’s charming when junior, his first time on the lake, catches a bigger fish than dad.** At the right time, anyone can catch fish. But to catch fish when they're not biting, to find fish when they are hiding and reclusive...it's not just something you master after a few simple pointers. And when fishing is your livelihood, you spend countless hours, days, years...even a lifetime developing a skill for knowing where the fish are and how best to catch them.

Fishing had been the livelihood of most of Jesus’ disciples before he told them, “drop your nets and follow me.” It’s no wonder that, as we see in the Gospel, Peter and the disciples took up fishing again after Jesus’ death. **Jesus died a shameful death on the cross, only to rise again on the third day, Easter morning, because death could not hold him; because God raises up the righteous.** And in our Gospel lesson, the newly risen Lord appears to his disciples for the third time by the Sea of Tiberias. And he saw them there fishing. FISHING!

Three years earlier, Jesus told his disciples to drop their nets and become fishers of men, and now Jesus finds that they have picked them back up again. They should have known better. **You may remember from last week, that Jesus had appeared to them already and breathed on them the Holy Spirit, giving them orders to forgive sins...and what do they do after receiving Him? They go out fishing.** Jesus had Thomas put his finger in his wounded hands and side to show that he, Lord Jesus, was real, and promised that the miracle of faith would come to those who have not yet seen him...**and the disciples respond by picking up their nets to go fishing**. Do they have selective hearing? Are they procrastinating...like when you clean the house instead of doing your taxes? Or are they afraid to forgive sins and profess Jesus, so they keep busy with other things instead?

Whatever the reason, the upshot is that Jesus had appeared to his disciples a third time after his resurrection, and they still weren’t doing what he had trained and instructed them to do. It's no wonder Jesus has to take Peter aside...the leader of the apostles, first amongst equals and say... "Peter, what are you doin’?" **Do you think I called you to follow me for three years so that, after I’ve died and risen again you could go back to doing what you did before?** Did I have you drop your nets and enroll in my seminary...what?...so you could have deep thoughts while your cleaning the seaweed out of your nets? Do you love me Peter?; then stop fishing. Stop wasting the precious time I spent on preparing you for ministry and *shepherd* my sheep.

This is the third time after Easter that the disciples are caught NOT preaching the gospel and forgiving sins. The first two times they were supposed to be spreading the Gospel, they had locked themselves away in a room and it isn't like they were preparing their sermons for Sunday. They were hiding. And this “third time,” they pick up again the fishing nets Jesus had told them to drop. **Peter was the one who said, “I will always follow, and never fall away,” and yet he denied Jesus three times.** And so Jesus takes Peter aside and asks him, not one, not two but three times, “**Do you love me**? **Then Feed and Tend my sheep**.” One time for each denial. One time for each time he and the others were caught not doing what they were called and appointed to do...*shepherd* Jesus’ sheep.

Do you know what the Latin word for shepherd is? Yes you do...I hear you say it to me all the time. The Latin word for shepherd is "Pastor." And as sure as in the beginning God said, "**Let there be light**" and there was light, Jesus is saying, right here "**Let there be Pastors.**" And Peter, and the disciples, after spending three years in seminary with Jesus, casting their nets and livelihood aside to be his learners, his "disciples", they were learning the "profession" of the Word of God.

I’m preaching about pastors today for two reasons. One, because that is what Jesus is talking about in the Gospel lesson. And two, because we live in a world where the “Pastoral Ministry” instituted by Christ himself is suffering some sort of identity crisis. Let me explain...

I remember reading a story from a Pastor once about how he was cleaning toilets in the church, and someone walked in on him and said (very reasonably I thought), "**You're the Pastor" what are you doing cleaning toilets?”** And the Pastor replied, (rather smugly I thought) “**A Pastor's no better than anyone else. Why shouldn't a Pastor clean toilets?**”

I remember thinking, "**Buddy, that congregation didn't issue you a Divine Call because they needed somebody to clean toilets. Granted, in many cases a Pastor is cheaper to hire than a janitor. Granted, there's nothing wrong with cleaning toilets--it doesn’t make you a lesser human being. But a Pastor is supposed to be spending his time bringing Communion to people who want to come to church but can't; he's supposed to be training people in God's word or studying it himself even more deeply so he can stand firm in the true faith, having answers for those who question God and are being led astray by the lies of the world. Rather than clean toilets to make some point about how pastors are servants, he should instead serve by being a pastor.**

Now, if a pastor *really* has nothing else to do, or if *nobody else* steps up to do it...then he can go ahead and clean toilets. It's sad if it comes to that, but somebody's gotta do it and if Jesus washed stinky feet, pastors can clean toilets. **But for Christ's sake...literally for Christ's sake, don't do it in order to prove that your just like everybody else...to prove that your "stuff stinks too**;" people already know, they can smell just fine. It's our hearing that Pastors are to attend to. You see, Pastors need to be reminded ***not*** to "pick up their nets" to avoid being a pastor. Don’t neglect preaching the word to wait on tables. Don’t neglect being a shepherd in order to prove you’re a sheep too.

We are all Christ’s sheep, and as such we are all called to humble ourselves, and a pastor doesn't have to “prove it” with stunts; that's a false humility. Because if he's tending the sheep as he should...then he has plenty of chance to *experience* and demonstrate humility when he tells someone that they've sinned and need to repent, and they all but spit in his face. Or when a Pastor says the church should do *this* or stop doing *that* and the advice is ignored or outright rejected because “**What does he know, he's a pastor, not a normal person**.”

Or when a sheep decides to wander off to another pasture because the one the pastor brought him to isn't good enough. And then, for the love of Christ, he goes after that lost sheep. Only he find this sheep is not as timid as the lost sheep in the parable...you know, in that famous picture...that gentle, meek lamb Jesus has heroically strung over his shoulders. **Instead, this sheep has fangs and hisses when you reach out to pick him up. *There's* a pastor's chance to be humbled, not by cleaning toilets, but by the many opportunities he will have to come face to face with his own inadequacy;** inadequacy which is so REAL he won't have to prove it. Inadequacy statistically demonstrated in the fact that **50% of ministers starting out will not last five years**. Inadequacy like doubting Thomas had...that tests his “**belief**” in God's Word, over against his “**seen**” failures. Inadequacy that will make him want to pick up his old nets, or a plunger, or whatever he can to avoid his cruciform Call to be a Pastor in the stead and by the command of Jesus.

We live in a world that hates Christianity, and hates those who hold Authority. Therefore--as Christians with an authoritative calling from God--Pastors are doubly cursed, and humbled. Jesus says to his future Pastors, "**If the world hates you, know that it hated me first**." In fact, Jesus tells Peter exactly what his Pastoring will ultimately mean for Him...he will be rejected, girded, and stretch out his arms to die on his own cross. No wonder Peter wanted to go back to fishing; no wonder Jesus had to repeatedly remind him and encourage him to "**feed my sheep**."

You don't have to be a Pastor to be saved, but evidently **you have to have a Pastor to be fed**, because Jesus doesn't promise to do it ***directly*** himself. He tells Peter to pastor his sheep, and he wouldn't do such a thing if he was planning to do it without him, or if he expected his sheep to pastor themselves. **Sheep are either of a flock, or they are lost; and if they are of a flock it needs a shepherd...at least Jesus seems to think so.**

Jesus is the Good Shepherd, but he doesn't shepherd directly, if he did we wouldn't have pastors; God is our Father, but he doesn't parent directly; if he did we wouldn't have parents; The Holy Spirit fills you with faith and grace, but He doesn't enter your heart directly, if he did we wouldn't have Word and Sacrament. We can rely only upon the ways and means that God establishes himself and promises to work through.

So, to recap, Jesus said (in not so many words) “**Let there be Pastors**.” This is not an optional thing for the church or for the individual Christian...unless you think Jesus’ words are optional. **Second, Jesus has to remind Pastors to be Pastors, that is, to serve him by serving his flock “word and sacrament”; because when pastors face rejection, it will be much easier to go fishing or clean toilets than to handle the sacred instruments of God almighty.** Third, sheep are not supposed to pastor themselves; if they were, then having a Pastor would be redundant...that’s why there is an identity crisis in the **“church”** today...because everybody thinks they are supposed to choose their own beliefs about God and their own way to worship him. The design of Christ is that the Pastor is to direct the belief of the flock, not to his own ends or design, but to the Word of God. And so far I have only mention the hardships in this task; but God gives joy as well. Joy comes when a pastor does his job and, by the will of the Holy Spirit, faith is created and sustained even in one lost sheep. It is not only a cross but a joy to do the work of the Lord, which is its own reward.

But ladies and gentlemen, don't think that God only works through Pastors. He said "Let there be Pastors" and he gave them a job that only Pastors are supposed to do. **But “Pastor” is only one vocation among many.** Daily we joyfully draw on the vocation (that is the calling) of plumbers, electricians and carpenters—also mechanics, barbers, cooks, bankers, and artists. Now, individuals who do have do-it-yourself talents should by all means use them; having such diverse abilities is itself a gift from God, a collection of callings. **But the point is, in our earthly lives, we do not have to do everything. Earthly life consists of giving and receiving, serving and being served, in a network of economic and social and personal and spiritual interdependence.** Without the practice of fishing or other suppliers of food, Pastors would starve and die; but that doesn’t mean that Pastors need to be fishermen. Without the “pastoring” of faith, fishermen would starve for the Gospel and die, but that doesn’t mean that fishermen must be Pastors...they can, but they must first drop their nets.

You are called by God to do whatever you do in fear and love of him; gathering upon the strength of his promise by gathering every Lord's Day to receive Word and Sacrament, and going out into the world and BEING a neighbor to everyone in everything you do.

You don't have to have go to seminary to be a member of the body of Christ; but you do need to always be prepared to give an account of the faith that is in you. **The best way to do that is to take measures to make sure faith is in you, and that the faith that is in you is the biblical faith; and that the spirit in you is the Holy Spirit**; and that the God you worship is the one who so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son so that you may believe and have eternal life.

Flock of Christ...You are blessed. You are died for by the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world and declares you forgiven. It is because of this grace alone that you have not given up on the words of Jesus. **You come to gather on the Lord's Day because, by His grace, you have not become like the multitude of the world who expect Jesus to start up a churchless home delivery service to their heart.** Jesus says, “I am everywhere; but I ***promise*** to be here, where My Church is, where my body and blood are, **where my Word is proclaimed, where my shepherd guides, where my flock gathers there I will be also, for you my lost and found sheep.”**