

Unity in Community
 1 Peter 5:1-14
 Tampa Covenant Church
 24 November 2024

Proposition: As the body of Christ, the church serves as a contrast community to a watching world through the practices of servant leadership, holistic humility, and collective sobriety in the face of adversity all to the glory of God.

FCF: The folly of selfishness and pride in the covenant community

RHF: Through his death burial and resurrection, Jesus Christ has made us members of God's household and calls us to follow his supreme example of sacrificial living in maintaining unity in community.

(#1) Introduction:

Today marks our last sermon in 1 Peter. Here in chap 5, Peter issues his final exhortations to these Christian communities scattered throughout Asia Minor. And he isn't necessarily bringing up anything new rather he's applying some of the themes he's already discussed to the existing relationships in the community. The members of these budding churches were doing life together amid a hostile culture and they needed to hear and receive these gospel truths repeatedly in seeking to preserve their unity as the body of Christ. It's like that friend or relative who often repeats the same advice. And when it happens, we're quick to respond, "Yup, I know... you've said it 100x." Now, I don't know if any in those days rolled their eyes as this portion of the letter was being read. But if they did, I don't think it would've mattered to Peter because he knew these Gospel truths came from the heart of God.

As a church we also need to hear these gospel truths repeatedly. Because we too comprise the body of Christ and with that distinction comes the call for us to reflect the heart of God by striving together in preserving our unity in community amid a **(#2) hostile culture**. And Peter tells us, it starts with servant leadership, continues in holistic humility toward one another, followed by collective sobriety in the face of adversity. So, let's look to the Lord in prayer then seek to take his word into **(#3) our hearts**.

Servant Leadership: *Shepherding the Flock* vv.1-4

(#4) Back in 2010, CBS debuted a show entitled Undercover Boss. It's somewhat of a corny show but gets at the heart. The show is about corporate execs who leave the comfort of their offices, dress in disguise and immerse themselves in the day-to-day operations of their organizations. They're usually paired with a loyal, unassuming employee, responsible for their training. And it's pretty comical watching these undercover bosses learn their new roles. In the end, they walk away with a new found appreciation for their frontline workers and they learn how out of touch they've been as leaders.

(#5) In addressing the elders of these Christian communities, Peter lets them know, he's not out of touch because he refers to himself as a fellow elder. He wasn't some super apostle peering down on them from an ivory tower. Rather, he understood the challenges of church leadership. And as a fellow elder, he tells them, he "*witnessed the sufferings of Christ, making him "a partaker in the glory to be revealed."* Now the call for these fellow elders is to continue the faithful apostolic witness of Christ's sufferings he's passing to them; making them fellow partakers in the glory of Christ yet to be revealed.¹ In the NT, elders served as pastors, bishops, overseers, leaders and rulers of the churches.² And with all this authority and privilege it was probably easier to lead from the ivory tower.

Peter is saying, “*don’t lead that way.*” (#6) **Instead, he tells** these elders to work as shepherds in exercising spiritual care³ over God’s flock. And Peter is no stranger to the call of shepherding God’s people. In John 21, when he’s restored, Jesus asks him three times, “*Simon, son of John, do you love me?*” And three times Peter responds, “*Yes Lord, you know I love you.*” And Peter is commanded in each instance, “*Feed my lambs,*” “*Tend my sheep,*” “*Feed my sheep.*” And the key word here is “my” because the flock does not belong to the elders; the flock belongs to God. Knowing this invites us to reshape our understanding of authority and privilege within the church; it’s not a dictatorship. It’s stewardship; exercising spiritual care and oversight over God’s flock as outlined in his word. So, Peter takes time to unpack the manner in which this spiritual care is exercised with three “*not that but this*” statements:

(#7) **First**, “*not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you;*” Don’t serve out of obligation! No one should have to crowbar you into service; if that’s the case you will not serve faithfully. Paul tells Timothy if anyone aspires (stretching oneself) toward the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. When examining prospective elders in this church, we ask them: “*Speak to your desire to serve as an elder?*” If the answer is “*well, I spoke to my wife and kids and they said I’d be good at it so I guess I’ll give it a shot...*” Not a good answer! There has to be a sincere desire in the heart to serve God’s people; see it as a noble task and agree to serve not as others would have you serve but as God would have you to serve.

(#8) **Second**, “*not for shameful gain, but eagerly;*” Peter is consistent with scripture that elders are not to serve for shameful gain. Paul tells Timothy and Titus the same thing. Those who serve as elders must not be greedy for gain. Because their greed will cause them to dishonestly divert the freewill offerings of God’s people into their own coffers to satisfy their shameful desire. Rather, the proper attitude of an elder should be an eagerness to give; not a shameful desire to get.

(#9) **Third**, “*not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.*” The elder is not called to be a lord and master over those in his charge but lead them in humble obedience to God; out of his humble obedience to God. And this happens through practical engagement! This is what took place in the upper room on the night when Jesus was betrayed. Our true Lord and Master, provided the greatest example of servant leadership when he laid aside his outer garments, took a towel, wrapped it around his waist, poured water into the basin and washed the feet of his disciples; a job reserved for children and slaves. Elders make themselves examples to the flock by being present in the lives of the flock; in all seasons of life; times of pain, sorrow and also joy. (#10) **And Peter** is clear in v.4, that elders who bear the burden of faithfully shepherding God’s flock willingly, eagerly, and as role models will receive the unfading crown of glory when Christ, the Chief Shepherd, is revealed. (#11) **And what** we see is that servant leadership opens the door for the practice of holistic humility in the community.

Holistic Humility: vv.5a-7 *Toward one another and Under the Mighty Hand of God*

(#12) **Here in the** first part of v.5, Peter turns his attention to “the younger” in saying, “*Likewise (in the same way), you who are younger, be subject to the elders.*” Scholars agree, Peter isn’t referring to the relationships between the older and younger men in the community but between the leaders and those being led.⁴ Peter is brief here, maybe because he’s already given significant treatment to the issue of submission; “*voluntarily arranging oneself under another’s authority.*” In this instance, he seems to be

reminding those being led that submission to God ordained authority should also be practiced in the covenant community.

Now when you recall everything Peter's already said concerning eldership; it's clear he's not telling this group to shut up and color and do everything the elders say. Rather, the call is for both the leaders and those being led to relate to one another with the understanding that Christ is the Chief Shepherd over the entire community. (#13) Remember, Peter reminded these communities in 2:25 that before Christ, *every one of them were straying as sheep but have now returned to the shepherd and overseer of their souls.* Therefore, all were to submit to the Lordship of Christ first and live it out in the community. It's leader and follower submitting to one another out of reverence for the Chief Shepherd.

Peter seems to allude to this in v.5b when (#14) he says to the entire community, *"clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another,"* Needless to say, this exhortation flew in the face of a culture that viewed the practice of humility more like weakness than virtue.⁵ But Peter was calling these Christians to live counter-culturally in a hostile society. He already exhorted them to be of a humble mind in 3:8, now he tells them to clothe themselves with this same humility. Here Peter uses a Greek word that denotes tying a garment (apron) around one's waist.⁶ So, he's literally telling these Christians and us to, *"tie the apron of humility around our waists and get to work in serving one another."* Those who lead are to do so with humility and those who follow; are to do likewise. No one is exempt because humility is the thread that weaves the fabric of unity together in the covenant community.

(#15) Saint Teresa of Avila was quoted as saying, *"Humility must always be doing its work like a bee making its honey in the hive: without humility all will be lost."*⁷ Humbling ourselves in service to one another takes effort and it must be intentional because pride is extremely deceitful. Nothing tears at the fabric of unity in the church more than the folly of pride: *Pride says, why be selfless when you can be selfish? Why serve when you can be served? Why think of others when you can think of yourself?* This is that deep-rooted pride that seeks to make a home in our hearts and wreak havoc on our Christian testimony. When we suffer from this kind of pride, we in some sense have become our own god in thinking we call the shots. (#16) But Peter reminds these Christians and us; to rethink that position, *"For God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."*

Under the Mighty Hand of God

(#17) And so, the antidote for this kind of pride is found in v.6, *"Humble yourselves therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you."* This is the starting point for practicing Christian humility. And it's really a command to accept and endure difficulty as part of God's plan and purpose for our lives; knowing that he will exalt us at his proper time.⁸ It's what Lou shared last week in responding to suffering: *Not being shocked by fiery trials, but rejoicing that we're participating in the sufferings of Christ.* These Christians were most likely being publicly ridiculed, shunned and abused for their faith and the temptation to retaliate had to be on their minds. But Peter is saying remain humble during these perilous times because in some mysterious way; you're ultimately under the mighty hand of God. (#18) Therefore, the call is not to retaliate by fighting fire with fire but in v.7, *"cast all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you."*

(#19 Blank) Last week Lou gave us the play-by-play of how Jeremiah did just this; he threw all of his anxieties on the Lord in an unbridled/unfettered and unrestrained fashion. *And yet, nowhere in Jeremiah's book is he rebuked by God for his lament.* Why? Because during this time of confusion, frustration and sorrow; he didn't lash out in pride rather he humbled himself under God's mighty hand and recalled *that the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end, they're new every morning because of God's great faithfulness to his people.* And the call for us during seasons of trial and testing is no different. We voice our confusion, frustration and sorrow to God and cast every anxiety on him, knowing that he will exalt us by his mighty hand at his proper time. This is what keeps us grounded in the faith as a covenant community, enabling us to love and support each other during the many challenges we'll face in this life as we live for the life to come. **(#20) But** Peter, doesn't want these Christians and us to cast our anxieties on the Lord then let our guards down so he exhorts them to collective sobriety.

Collective Sobriety: *Remaining watchful for the enemy; hopeful in suffering*

(#21) In v.8, Peter warns these Christians they have a common enemy and it's not a particular member in the congregation; it's the devil. So, he exhorts everyone, *"Be soberminded; be watchful.* Lou told us these words were used in the ancient world to describe sentries who carefully watched their post and were aware what was taking place both inside and outside the walls of the city. This is the 3rd time Peter has exhorted these Christians to be sober minded (Hope & Prayers). This call to collective sobriety has to be practiced in the Christian community because the devil is always on the prowl looking to devour Christian flesh. Picture a flock of sheep grazing in the pasture and a hungry lion comes prowling and roaring looking for dinner. If the sheep scatter at the sound of the roar, one is sure to be devoured. But sometimes it's not the loud roar that scatters the sheep but their own wandering away from the flock for seemingly greener pastures, which also makes them more susceptible as prey.

In both scenarios, the devil's tactics are clear; destroy the unity of the flock by scattering the sheep through fear or the allure of greener pastures. **(#22) Therefore,** we heed Peter's exhortation to resist the devil firm in our faith. This means we remain united under the voice of our true shepherd. We listen to him and take our stand against the devil by holding fast to the gospel and our place in the covenant community.⁹ Through word, sacrament, prayer and fellowship, we keep watch over one another. And we pursue one another when one may be tempted to exchange the truth of God's word for a lie and wander off. And we do this, *"knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world."* Peter is saying to these Christian communities and to us that we're not to see ourselves as isolated, scattered individuals susceptible to the devil's attacks but see ourselves as God sees us; a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and a people for his very own possession. United together as a local church and a global church. Thus, we stand in solidarity with our sisters and brothers throughout the world; their suffering is our suffering; their adversary is our adversary and their call is our call; resist the devil firm in faith and in so doing we remain united under the voice of our true Shepherd.

(#23) Peter gives hopeful news in v.10, ¹⁰*And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.* In saying "a little while," Peter wasn't promising brief suffering on earth rather the suffering is considered

brief when compared to the future glory that will be revealed on the day of Christ.¹⁰ (#24) Warren Wiersbe rightly said, *“Satan promises you glory, but in the end, you receive suffering. God promises you suffering, but in the end, that suffering is transformed into glory.”* Peter has hammered home this truth throughout the letter. The Christian’s pathway to glory is marked with a road of suffering because the cross truly comes before the crown.

This truth may be a little unsettling because we all have a natural aversion to suffering...no one wants to be persecuted and treated less than human. But as Peter has already discussed in chap 2, the call to endure suffering is not (#25) without precedent. Because *“Christ also suffered leaving us an example that we might follow in his footsteps.”* He bore the wrath of our sin, guilt and shame before the Father, he took the nails, he wore the crown of thorns, he hung on that bloodstained cross and died a despicable death. But through his glorious resurrection from the dead, we share in the eternal glory of God with him. And just as Christ was restored, confirmed, strengthened and established by the Father; the same is true of us now and will be fully realized on that glorious day when all things are made new. (#26) Knowing this, Peter breaks out in an ascription of praise to God for his marvelous work of grace in our lives, *“to him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.”*

Conclusion:

(#27) In v.12 and following, he tells the reader what he’s written by way of Silvanus the scribe is the true grace of God. And the exhortation to both the elders and those being led is to stand firm in this gospel of grace. After doling out sundry greetings, Peter signs off by saying, *“peace to all of you who are in Christ.”* Church, it’s only in Christ we experience true peace. And by his Spirit he cultivates peace among us as members of God’s household: As he loves us, let us love one another. As he forgives us; let us forgive one another. And as he sacrificed his life so that we might live; let us live sacrificially and strive together in preserving our unity in community to the glory of God. So, may the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, continue to guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord, now and forevermore. Amen. (#28 Blank)

¹ Edmund P. Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter: The Way of the Cross*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 198.

² In the NT there were “pastors” (Eph. 4:11), “bishops or overseers” (Acts 20:28), “leaders” and “rulers” (Heb. 13:7; 1 Thess. 5:12) of the flock.

³ ἐπισκοπέω (*episkopeō*). vb. to oversee, care. *The act of overseeing another person*. This verb is used twice in the nt. The understanding is that a person or group of people are to oversee the spiritual state of others. The first use is in Heb 12:15, where the readers are commanded to “see to it” (*episkopeō*) that no one fails to lack the grace of God. The second is found in 1 Pet 5:2, where the overseer is commanded to shepherd the flock of God, “exercising oversight” (*episkopeō*). Ron Clark and Dougald McLaurin III, “Stewardship,” ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

⁴ Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 307.

⁵ Gordon D. Fee, *Philippians*, vol. 11, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1999), 88.

⁶ Peter uses a rare verb ἐγκομβόμαι (*egkomboimai*), which denotes more of tying something on oneself like an apron as opposed to the verb ἐνδύω (*enduō*), meaning to dress oneself (Mt 6:25; Mk 1:6; Lk 8:27; 24:49; Ac 12:21; Ro 13:12; 1Co 15:53; Gal 3:27; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10; 1Th 5:8; Rev 1:13; 2Co 5:3).

⁷ Mark Water, “*The New Encyclopedia of Christian Quotations*,” (Hampshire, UK: John Hunt Publishing, 2000). (Logos Software)

⁸ Jobes, 312.

⁹ Ibid, 315.

¹⁰ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, vol. 37, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 67.