

Pastoral Care Sunday Sermon – 20 June 2021
by Carol Sanders

Happy Father's Day to all the fathers, father figures, grandfathers, etc.

A boy was watching his father, a pastor, write a sermon. "How do you know what to say?" asked the little boy.

"Why, God tells me."

"Oh, then why do you keep crossing things out?"

With that in mind, I pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer. Amen.

Merriam Webster has 2 entries for the definition of Pastoral:

Definition of *Pastoral* from the Merriam-Webster Dictionary

1.
 - **a:** of, relating to, or composed of shepherds or herdsmen
 - **b:** of or relating to the countryside
 - **c:** portraying or expressive of the life of shepherds or country people especially in an idealized and conventionalized manner
2.
 - **a:** of or relating to spiritual care of guidance especially of a congregation
 - **b:** of or relating to the pastor of a church

Wikipedia says "A pastoral lifestyle is that of shepherds herding livestock around open areas of land according to seasons and the changing availability of water and pasture."

I thought it was interesting that, when looking for definitions of "Pastoral" I didn't immediately find definitions related to ministry, rather definitions related to shepherding.

It makes sense, though, when we think of Psalm 23, a psalm which has brought comfort and encouragement to hundreds of people over the years. The writer says, The Lord is my Shepherd. He takes care of all our needs, rest, nourishment, direction, comfort, safety, protection, and hope. In John 10:11 Jesus said "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep."

When Jesus was on earth he gave his disciples teachings and examples of how to serve and care for the needs of others. After being with the disciples for three years he was crucified for our sins, rose again

and ascended into heaven. From that time on believers have been the hands and feet of Jesus doing His work in the world.

Our reading this morning from 1 Peter 5:1-3 says “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 examples to the flock.”

Peter says to be eager to serve, not lording it over those entrusted to you. If anyone could have used his position or status to lord himself over people it was Jesus. But Jesus came from his glorious Kingdom as a baby, he was humble and came not to be served but to serve. He gave us an example of how to care for others and taught us to love our neighbors as ourselves; to give to those in need as if we were giving food, clothing and companionship to Jesus Himself as he described in our Matthew reading. But there are two sides to pastoral care. Being humble while serving, but also having to be humbled when being served. Peter knew about that when he had to humble himself to let Jesus wash his feet. Just as we must be humble in serving, we must remember how humbling it can be for those who are in need. People have a hard time asking for help. They can be embarrassed, ashamed, feeling like they should be able to handle things on their own. People who are lonely, hurting, sick or in need of help will often wait until they are desperate before asking for help.

There was a time in my life when I was getting by alright. I was married and although we both worked at clerical type jobs, mine was with the federal government and my husband's was with the city so we were not in high paying jobs with lots to spend, but we were doing alright. I was able to buy groceries for others, buy clothing, bedding, and other essentials for friends and neighbors. I would host wedding showers, baby showers, and birthday celebrations. I loved being able to give and minister to others. I gave gifts to others for every special occasion and a lot of times it was anonymous. It just made me feel like God was using me to be a blessing to others. A few years later I was on the benevolent team in my church, ministering in all kinds of ways, driving people to doctor's appointments, helping with things around their homes, babysitting, and so on. Then my world turned upside down. My husband left and I had 5 children under 13 with my youngest only 2. I stayed on the benevolent team and didn't say anything for quite a while. Finally I was desperate. I had always been the one listening, praying, giving, doing, and now I was the one needing support, emotional, spiritual, and financial. It was hard to admit to anyone I needed anything. I would much rather be the one giving than receiving. I can't even take a compliment without feeling embarrassed. At that time when I needed pastoral care and shepherding I did not have the Grace to let anyone else serve me. That line in the song we sang, “Brother, Sister Let Me Serve You” always hits hard, because having the grace to let others serve me was not something I was at all comfortable with and I am sure I am not alone in feeling that way. I would say I was even disobedient, and prideful. Finally I knew that Christ had put me in a group of believers who believed in taking care of the sheep in their flock. I left the benevolent team because all of a sudden I was the one in need.

Fortunately I was part of a church that practiced the fellowship described in Acts chapter 2:41-43. When Luke talks about fellowship here, he is referring to Koinonia

Definition of *Koinoinia* from the Merriam-Webster Dictionary

1. The Christian fellowship or body of believers
2. Intimate spiritual communion and participative sharing in a common religious commitment and spiritual community.

This is not just a fellowship hour after service where we have a coffee or tea and some sweets, and exchange pleasantries. Very often we remain superficial and if anyone asks us how we are doing we say fine. That is not the fellowship Peter is referring to. The fellowship Peter is referring to and that I was blessed to be a part of is Koinoinia.

Crosswalk.com says “In the Bible, koinoinia is more than friendship. It is a divinely intimate, holy unity among believers—and between believers and the Lord—involving everything from spiritual oneness in the Holy Spirit, community life, sharing contributions from money to food gifts, and the communion partaken in the body and blood of Christ Jesus. The Book of Acts is the first place we see the word koinoinia in the Bible. Here, it is translated to mean a deep community fellowship among believers. The passage goes on to elaborate about what this koinoinia looked like: communal-style living, where they “had everything in common,” sold property to give to anyone in need, gathered regularly in the temple courts, and ate together joyfully in their homes (43-47). Later, when Gentiles began to hear the Good News and also became Christian, we see the concept of koinoinia used to include them, too. Back then, Jews and Gentiles did not intermingle. But Christ at work in them through the power of the Holy Spirit allowed these separate groups to dissolve their former boundaries and become as one—true koinoinia. This is an example for us to invite others into our fellowship and remove the boundaries that would prevent this unity.

God does not expect us to sell everything and join a commune, but he does expect us to use what we have been given to be a blessing to others. Being shepherds of the flock God has given us, means providing the various types of the pastoral care a good shepherd would give his sheep; rest, nourishment, direction, comfort, safety, protection, and hope. In Koinoinia everyone has the opportunity to use the gifts they have been given. We know in the body of Christ there are many gifts and each one is important. When I think about shepherding the flock God has entrusted to us I believe God gives us Spiritual gifts, a heart or passion for a cause, natural abilities, our personality, and our experiences to minister as needed. This comes from a study by Rick Warren pastor of Saddleback Church and author of *The Purpose Driven Life* called SHAPE. We may have the ability to sit, visit and pray with someone while someone else would excel at making meals or baking. Someone else might have the time to take someone to their appointments while someone else might be able to help with repairs around their house. The shepherd provides a safe place for the sheep to rest, water and food for nourishment, protection from thieves and wild animals. For each person who humbly asks for help, God provides people with the gifts to humbly serve them.

There are two sides to Pastoral Care – the one who provides and the one who needs it. At one time we could be on one side and at another time we could be on the other side just as I experienced. Those experiences give us the empathy we need when serving with others.

Whatever you think about yourself or your gift, sometimes pastoral care is just showing up. We can't cure people, fix all their issues, and solve all their problems. We can't take on their burdens to our own emotional and physical detriment. We may feel helpless or overwhelmed and think we have nothing to offer. I found this quote from Henri Nouwen, who was a professor, writer, priest and theologian from his book *Out of Solitude: Three Meditations on the Christian Life*.

When we honestly ask ourselves which person in our lives mean the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a warm and tender hand.

The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing, not curing, not healing and face with us the reality of our powerlessness, that is a friend who cares.

Henri Nouwen, *Out of Solitude: Three Meditations on the Christian Life*, Ave Maria Press

We will be going into our prayer time shortly. When the prayers are done I invite you to remain in an attitude of prayer as we sing "Here I Am Lord".

Are you needing the grace to let someone serve you, to come along side you, to sit with you or provide help at this time in your life?

Are you able to use your gifts to go to God's people, to be God's hands and feet to a hurting world?

Where ever you are on your life's journey God invites you to trust Him and say, Here I Am Lord.