

We bow our hearts in prayer: Dear Jesus, Good Shepherd of our bodies and souls, You have given to us Your own body and soul into death that we may not die, and have sent pastors over us so that we might live in You. Shepherd us into Your eternal pastures through their faithful service as they feed and nourish us with You alone. Amen.

Dear fellow redeemed, fellow sheep in God's pasture,
After Jesus rose, He appeared frequently to His disciples and continued to teach and instruct them.
When He instructed them to "**make disciples**," He did not leave it to our imaginations
how this was to be done.
He told us how: "**Baptizing them... and teaching them all that I have commanded you.**"

Around this same time, Jesus restored Peter to the apostolic ministry as He asked Peter 3 times,
"Do you love me?" The same number of times Peter had denied Him on Good Friday morning.
After Peter answered, "**Yes, Lord, You know that I love you,**" each of the 3 times, John 21:15-17
Jesus gave Peter commands, "**Feed My lambs... 'shepherd' My sheep... Feed My sheep.**"

Now we might wonder how one is to feed and shepherd God's sheep. But we don't need to.
By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit through this very apostle, we learn what Jesus means.
... We read as follows in Jesus' name:

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: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. (ESV)

*This is Your Word, heavenly Father; **sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth.** Amen.* (John 17:17)

After years of having served as an apostle and elder among God's people,
St. Peter explains what Jesus meant about **shepherding the flock of God**.
First and foremost, we see that the task is to set God's Son before God's people.
St. Peter does that even in this brief text as he writes about Jesus' suffering, and His return in glory.
This is not accomplished by a mere passing reference about Jesus, so that you can check it off
some sermon prep list as you prepare for the "real" purpose of the sermon:
to teach people how to live now in Christ.
To preach in this way, is not to set God's Son before God's people
but to encourage God's people to set their own works before God.

No, to set God's Son before God's people's eyes is to portray Him as having been *conceived, born, suffered, crucified, died, and buried* as their complete substitute for their sin before the Father.
It is to preach Christ's resurrection as the proof of their righteousness, their right-ness, before God.
It is to preach Jesus' ascension, His sitting at the Father's right hand, and His return in glory
as a comfort to forgiven sinners that God is still watching over you to bring you into His glory.
This is the true work of Christ's under-shepherds.

And so that His ministers might accomplish this task, He has given them certain responsibilities, and with those responsibilities, His authority to carry them out.

In our text St. Peter writes: **shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight.**

This **oversight** is not a totalitarian authority over the flock's entire lives.

The shepherd (or pastor) does not exercise authority in matters that are not spiritual or moral.

We can't tell you what address to live at or what job to take.

While you might ask your pastor for counsel in deliberating such things, we don't have, nor do we want, such authority.

These things are important for you, the flock, to know and understand,

so that you know what kind of oversight you are to expect and not expect from your pastors.

It's easy in our day, as so many others are doing, to view the pastor as the CEO of a congregation or the vision-casting leader that everyone is to enthusiastically, though blindly, follow.

But these thoughts are fraught with temptations **for shameful gain**

and, eventually, **domineering over those in one's charge** when people's "visions" don't agree.

The oversight that pastors are to exercise is over spiritual matters

and even there, it is limited to what God has said.

The shepherd is not to use his position to assert his own opinions as if they are the Lord's Word.

He may not command what God has not commanded, nor forbid what God hasn't forbidden.

In the same vain, the pastor has no right to forgive sins that are not repented of,

nor to withhold God's declaration of forgiveness to those who have repented.

With this oversight comes the responsibility to address sinners regarding their sins.

This is done publicly as in the liturgy, the Divine Service.

We see it first in the confession of sins as the pastor leads the congregation

to "*bow before the Lord and confess our sins.*"

It is more specifically done here in the sermon where the pastor will consider various sins

from the text that are common to all man or more specific to temptations of his congregation.

It is done again before receiving the Lord's Supper when the pastor exhorts each communicant

to examine his or her life and to come to the altar only in true repentance.

But lest you think that the oversight and authority here are only in regards to sin,

notice what is the end and the purpose for which the sin is addressed here.

It is always to prepare the sinner to be forgiven, to receive forgiveness with a thankful heart,

for what comes after the confession of sins, but the absolution.

*"I, by virtue of my office as a called and ordained servant of the Word,
announce the grace of God to all of you, and in the stead and by the command
of our Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sins..."*

Though there are some, even in Christendom, who recoil at these words,

the pastor exercises his authority very clearly when he declares in the absolution.

This authority isn't to inflate the ego of the pastor, as if he is such an important guy.

May it never be! Instead is to give you, the penitent, the comfort and confidence that he,

as an authorized ambassador of God, speaks to you God's declaration of forgiveness.

And that those sins which he is there loosing are indeed also *loosed before God in heaven*.
And when you come up to the altar, the pastor stands there as the authorized distributor
of the Good Shepherd's body and blood *given for you for the forgiveness of your sins*.

While the confession and absolution, the sermon, and the Holy Communion are
all very personal and individual impartations of God's forgiveness,
they are received collectively during the public Divine Service.

But this spiritual oversight is also applied privately.

As your shepherd, your pastor is concerned for you when he doesn't see you regularly
coming to the Lord's house or to altar to receive God's forgiveness or to listen to your Lord.
Or when a report is heard of a public offense that has been given within the congregation,
that a sin has been committed with no repentance to follow it,
or that a sin is being lived in with no amendment of life,
here the pastor has the unenviable responsibility to address this sin with the individual
so that he or she might recognize the offense and seek forgiveness.

But in such individual cases, though often difficult and uncomfortable,
the pastor's desire, aim, and goal is to unburden the conscience of the individual
and comfort her in the declaration of her forgiveness so that she may again Commune
with her Good Shepherd and His flock, that they might all lie down in good pasture together.

Even in such situations, St. Peter exhorts the pastor that he is not to do this **under compulsion,**
but willingly, as God would have you, even **eagerly** as the Good Shepherd leaves the 99
in order to search out and find the 1 lost sheep.
For this is not in order to condemn the sinner, but to lead him to his Shepherd's waiting arms.

This spiritual oversight is also privately applied in private confession.
Here the penitent comes on his own accord, as Luther says, *to acknowledge those sins that he knows
and feels in his heart* so that he might hear the comforting declaration of forgiveness.

In all this the pastor, St. Peter admonishes, is to be an example.
To be diligent in repentance and eager to seek forgiveness from his Shepherd,
for, of all people, he knows that he does not fulfill this office perfectly,
nor any vocation that he has, in home, community, or church.
But his comfort is not found in how well he completes his tasks,
how many sinners God might use him to convert, nor how large the congregation he serves.

The same as the people he serves, his comfort is found in Jesus alone,
the **Good Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep;** who took it back up and gives it to you.
who now searches for His straying sheep to heal and restore;
and to nourish them on the green pastures of Word, His body and blood,
so that when He *comes in glory to judge the living and the dead,*
they might lie down in complete security and comfort of conscience, in peace and joy.

He is risen!

C: He is risen indeed!

Alleluia!