

“From Sheep to Shepherd”

Soul Shift – part #7. Based on the book by Steve DeNeff and David Drury

Scriptures: Matthew 4:18-22 and John 21:15-19

Would you pray with me please? Dear Jesus, you are the good shepherd. We come today expecting to be led by you into green pastures and beside still waters. We long for you to care for our souls, as we learn to care for others. Please use this moment now to bless, admonish and encourage us. We want to follow you. We ask this in your name. Amen.

When I was a freshman in college, I loved playing baritone in the marching band. (I still do, actually.) College bands are normally student led. Every instrument group has a section leader and a drill instructor, usually upper-classmen, who report to the drum majors and band director. It is a privilege to be chosen as a section leader, and frankly, it's hard work.

The summer of my sophomore year I had a bit of a shock. My section leader and friend, Dean Ocampo, called me to say he was switching to tuba, and there were no other juniors or seniors left in the baritone section. “You should be the section leader this year,” he told me. And he was right. Thankfully, it was a small section, just six players.

As section leader, I made sure we memorized our music and played it correctly. I made sure we were on time for rehearsal. I demonstrated correct marching form and posture. And all eyes (at least the five other pairs in my section) were on me. It was intimidating, but it was a great opportunity to learn leadership. I ended up being section leader for the four years (Yes, I spent 5 years in the band.)

Some people shine when given the opportunity to lead. Others wilt under the gaze of scrutiny and wish they were in the background. How do you feel when someone asks you to lead? Are you excited? Scared? A little of both?

There is a common misconception in the church, that we need to be good followers, who quietly sit through the sermon, put money in the offering, bring casseroles to potlucks, and otherwise cheer on Jesus “from the stands”. In reality, Jesus calls us to do more than just follow. He wants us to be shareholders, ministry partners, willing volunteers who lead others. We should never be

content to simply follow Jesus passively, like we are in some sort of parade. Real discipleship is not just showing up, it is being willing to teach and lead, no matter who you are.

We are called to invest in others, to care for them like a shepherd cares for their sheep. We all are called to lead others in the church. Just read what the Apostle Peter says in 1 Peter 5:2-4:

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;³ not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.⁴ And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. (1 Peter 5:2-4)

We might think, “Yeah, but that was the famous Apostle Peter, the guy with the keys to the kingdom of heaven.” Before you put Peter on a pedestal, look closer at Peter’s life, and at the life of all the disciples, because even they had to figure out how to change from sheep to shepherd.

As we read a moment ago, Jesus calls Peter and the other disciples from the shore of Lake Galilee with the invitation, “Come, follow me, and fish for people.” (Matt 4:19). That is an intriguing invitation to action. I love how Steve DeNeff puts it: “The disciples do not follow Jesus because they want their sins forgiven or want eternal life. They follow Jesus because they are interested in the one who called them.”¹

Throughout his life, Jesus constantly showed the disciples how to fish for people. He showed them how to be a shepherd. My favorite example is the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000. Matthew 9:36 records, “When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” That’s how the miracle began. Jesus saw their need. Jesus then asked his disciples to help him find food and distribute it, miraculously multiplying what they gave. The disciples had an active part in this miracle of compassion.

¹ DeNeff, Soul Shift sermon on DVD.

The key to being a shepherd is to see the needs of the people around you and do something about it. In John 10:11-18, Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd. What does he do for his sheep? He lays down his life for them. He protects them. He calls to them, and they recognize his voice. Jesus knows his sheep, and he loves them. That’s our calling, too.

In several passages, we see the following Jesus means being sent out to do ministry, to be shepherds, to be fishers of people. At first, Jesus simply sent out his disciples two by two. (Luke 9:1-6, 10:1-12. Mark 6:6-12). Then after the resurrection, Jesus sent hundreds of disciples out into the world. (Acts 1) They listened. They prayed, taught, preached and baptized. We are here today because they were faithful to Christ and went as he told them to.

Again, DeNeff has this to say: “Jesus did not come to earth simply to forgive us. Jesus came earth to recruit us. He did not come to earth so you could go to heaven, he came so that you could help him bring heaven to earth.”²

The apostle Peter, a fisherman by trade, left everything to follow Christ. He was brash and headstrong, and got into trouble more than once. He infamously denied Jesus three times the night before the Crucifixion. And yet Jesus never gave up on Peter. After the Resurrection, Jesus met Peter on the beach with these commands: “Feed my lambs....Take care of my sheep....Feed my sheep.” (John 21:15-17) This instruction was important enough to repeat three times. And Peter got it. He preached, taught, and cared for others.

That is the call Jesus gives to us today. Don’t be content to just be a sheep. Be a shepherd. Take a risk. Lead and feed. Invest in others. Look for ways to serve, to set the example, to step out in faith.

Colossians 3:23 tells us, whatever we do, we should do it as if working for the Lord. Be a partner with Jesus. Be a shepherd. Witness, serve, heal. Be there for others. Listen to them. Touch them. Go be with them.

I often hear people say, “Isn’t that the pastor’s job? Don’t I have to be ordained or attend seminary before I can be a shepherd?” No, you don’t. In fact, we have this very important admonition in our United Methodist Book of Discipline: “All Christians are called through their baptism to the ministry of

² Ibid.

servanthood (outreaching love expressing the mind and mission of Christ) in the world to the glory of God and for human fulfillment." Let me put that simply: All Christians, by virtue of their baptism, are ministers of the gospel. You. Me. Us. We are ministers. We are shepherds of Jesus's flock.

So step up. Step out. See the people. Have compassion on them. Feed them.

A few years ago, Matthew West wrote an amazing song called "Do Something." I won't sing it for you, but just listen to some of the lyrics.

I woke up this morning
Saw a world full of trouble now,
I thought,
"How'd we ever get so far down, and
How's it ever gonna turn around?"
So I turned my eyes to Heaven
I thought,
"God, why don't You do something?"
Well, I just couldn't bear the thought
of people living in poverty
Children sold into slavery
The thought disgusted me
So, I shook my fist at Heaven
I said,
"God, why don't You do something?"
He said, "I did...I created you!"

Oh, it's not enough to do nothing
It's time for us to do something

I'm so tired of talking about
How we are God's hands and feet
But it's easier to say than to be
Live like angels of apathy
who tell ourselves, "It's alright,
somebody else will do something"
Well, I don't know about you
But I'm sick and tired
of life with no desire
I don't want a flame, I want a fire
and I wanna be the one
who stands up and says,
"I'm gonna do something"

If not us, then who?
If not me and you?
Right now,
it's time for us to do something
If not now, then when
Will we see an end
To all this pain?

If not us, then who?
If not me and you?
Right now,
it's time for us to do something
If not now, then when
Will we see an end
To all this pain?

It's not enough to do nothing
It's time for us to do something

You are meant for so much more than you think in God's kingdom. You have a part to play, a song to sing, a word to speak. The church does not exist to simply serve itself. We are here to care for others, to take personal responsibility for our own spiritual growth, to see that all of us are leaders of someone. Ask yourself, “What does it look like for me to lead? How can I influence others spiritually? Will I be a partner in the gospel of Christ?”

When we shift from sheep to shepherd, our outlook on life totally changes. We no longer come on Sunday morning expecting to be entertained, expecting to be fed. Instead, we expect to lead, engage, and feed others. We expect to contribute to the worship, not just consume. We realize that this moment, right here, right now, is our shepherding 101 class, and when we walk out those doors, it's time to practice what we've learned.

This week, try asking yourself these questions, as you shift from Sheep to Shepherd:

When I look at others, do I see what they could become?

Do I see what God could do in their lives if I invest in them?

Will I follow the example of Jesus and go after the one lost sheep God places in my life?

My prayer is your answer to all those questions is a loud, resounding, “Yes!”

Before we pray, I want to give you a reminder and an invitation. On Sunday, October 30th, we are asking for people to share their testimonies of how God has used the Soul Shift program to change your life. We want to celebrate the journey we have taken together. There is no sermon planned for October 30th, so please contact your small group leader or the church office if you would like to share your story that day. Stories can be spoken, read, and even recorded on video.

(Continue with Prayers of the People.)

Blessing – And now receive this blessing:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and evermore. Amen.

Memory Verse: 1 Peter 5:2 (NIV)

“Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing.”

Reflection Questions

1. How often do you come to church expecting others to feed and lead you?
2. When have you invested time and effort into someone else’s spiritual growth? What was (or would be) the result?
3. What do you think of Peter’s words, “Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care”? (1 Pet. 5:2) Can you see how they are meant for you?
4. What is one way you can shift from Sheep to Shepherd this week?