**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church**

**Watertown, WI**

**“More Than These”**

Pastor Aaron Reseburg

May 4, 2025

*John 21:1-19*

Peter is a complicated figure in the Gospels. Peter, of all the disciples, seems to reach the highest of highs and the lowest of lows. Peter has one of the clearest statements of belief in the entire Bible. When Jesus asks the disciples “Who do you say that I am?” Peter replies, “You are the Christ! The Son of the living God.” In the very next story, though, Jesus will call Peter *Satan* and tell him to get behind Him. Peter will be one of the few disciples who follow Jesus to His trial, but upon arriving, He will deny Jesus three times.

Peter has his ups, and Peter has his downs. I think that should make Peter a relatable figure to most of us. We have our ups and our downs, times when our faith is strong and times when our faith is weak, mountain tops and low valleys. It doesn’t matter how old you are either, children, youth, young adults, adults, and the elderly, if there is breath in your lungs, you will experience both strong and weak faith.

In our Gospel reading, Peter puts his love for the Lord on full display. John tells him it’s the Lord, so Peter hurls himself into the water to get to Jesus as quickly as he can even though the boat was not far off the shore, close enough to have loud conversation regarding fish.

Peter gets to shore, and Jesus and the disciples have a meal together. During the meal, Jesus asks Peter three times if he loves Him—three times for the three times that Peter denied Jesus. Peter is given the chance to redeem himself. It’s time for Peter to step up; it’s time for Peter to come out of the darkness and into the light. Jesus has a calling for Peter.

All throughout the Gospels, Jesus has always been the shepherd. Jesus has been the one taking care of His lambs and His sheep. Soon, though, Jesus is going away. Jesus is going to ascend into heaven, and He needs someone to care for His lambs and His sheep. He needs someone to be His representative, someone to stand for Him and to feed His sheep, to care for His church.

So, He makes Peter a pastor. In fact, Jesus has already made all of the apostles pastors. He has breathed on them and filled them with the Holy Spirit. It is their job to care for the children and adults of Christ’s church.

It is a pastor’s job to preach the Word in season and out, to feed Christ’s sheep with food that will sustain them. To give them the Word of God. The pastor cares for the sheep, but they are not his sheep. I find this both comforting and distressing.

It is comforting because I know that Christ is really the one in charge, I know that it is really Christ working through all things. My failures and my sins will not throw someone out of the kingdom of God. It is comforting because Christ can work through my successes and my failures as a pastor to care for His sheep.

It is also distressing because God has entrusted His sheep to my care. They belong to Him, and woe to those who would try to take them out of His hand. Woe to those who would mislead His sheep and give them anything less than the very best. Jesus even says that it would be better for a millstone to be hung around one’s neck and drown in the sea rather than lead one of His sheep astray.

This is the great comfort that comes with our historic liturgy and hymns. They may take some getting used to, but they are the best, nothing but the best. Nothing but the best spiritual food for all of us who are Jesus’ lambs, pastors included.

The liturgy and much of our hymnody has been feeding Christians for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. It is here to feed you when your faith is weak or strong. It is here to feed whether you feel happy or sad, whether you are excited about life or dreading the thought of tomorrow. God’s Word in the liturgy gives us hope for the future by connecting us to the past, by connecting us to the thousands of years of Christians who have also gone through highs and lows.

Peter and the apostles continued Jesus’ ministry of caring for the sheep of Israel. For two thousand years, God has called men into the office of the Holy Ministry to do the same, to feed His sheep. There is a great need for pastors in the LCMS. Just looking at our district website today, there are 12 congregations in South Wisconsin who are actively trying to call a pastor, but there are probably just as many without a pastor who have not begun the process yet.

It is every Christian man’s duty to consider whether or not God is calling him to be a pastor. Is God calling you to care for His sheep? Is He calling your son? Your grandson?

The Lord will care for His sheep; the Lord will provide pastors, with or without us. But the exciting thing about how God interacts with this world is that He loves to use His creation to do His work, including you and me. God could speak to you all directly here on Sunday mornings. You could sit down, and He could speak from the sky, but He has decided to work in a different way.

In the wilderness, He fed the children of Israel with manna and quail. He quenched their thirst with water from a rock. Today, He uses pastors to feed His people. He uses pastors to give us food far better than bread and meat; He gives us something far better from water from a rock.

Today, He uses pastors to feed His chosen people His very own body and blood, given and shed for us for the forgiveness of our sins. He uses pastors to feed people with His Word spoken from the pulpit and read from a lectern. Here in the Divine Service, God feeds us with the liturgy and our hymn, whether we are happy or sad, whether we are trusting or doubting, as long as there is some part of us that still holds onto God’s promises. God is here today to give you everything that you need, and He is going to use a pastor to do it.

By the shore of the sea of Galilee 2,000 years ago, the risen Lord Jesus Christ gave Peter and the apostles a direction. He made them pastors; He set them apart to feed and care for His sheep. Today, God continues to call men into the office of the Holy Ministry to care for you and to care for me as well. That is good news! People often wonder where God is in their lives. They wonder why it feels like He is so far away. In my experience, many of those people do not attend the Divine Service on a regular basis.

God is here today, and He is ready to serve you. Whether you are up or down or somewhere in the middle, He is ready to care for you; He is ready to feed you. He is ready to do all this because He loves you and cares for you deeply. You are His sheep; He is your true shepherd. Next week is Good Shepherd Sunday. Next week, we will see just how much the Good Shepherd is willing to do in order to care for His sheep.

In the name of Jesus, amen.