

## **To the Elders and the Flock      1 Peter 5:1-6**

I do not know if you already know that the word “presbyter”, from which the name “Presbyterian” is derived, is actually a New Testament word *presbyteros*, often translated as “elder.” And, the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand of which Drury is a Parish of, is a church ruled or governed by *presbyteros*- elders, those who preside over Christian Assemblies, churches or congregations. Our Presbyterian denomination has at its roots the Sixteenth Century Church Reformers, the forebears who includes the likes of John Calvin and John Knox, to acknowledge because they believed that in the church the rule and governance of elders was consistent with the history and theology of the early church, as witnessed to by the writings and teaching contained in the New Testament. And our scripture reading from 1 Peter 5 this morning testifies to this being agreeable to the word of God as the Apostle Peter, in these few verses, describes the office of eldership in terms of pastoral oversight and authority along with an implied stewardship function, which is something that we as a growing Session at DPC have been learning about together as Elders, and soon to be ordained and inducted elders at this service. So with this in mind let’s see just what we can learn together from Peter in his message, which is for both elders and the flock alike, to acknowledge and grow in as followers of Christ in His church today. In the first instance Peter addresses the elders among you

### **Be shepherds of God’s flock**

Now this is a metaphor that Jesus himself had used [Luke 15:3-7; John 10:1-18] that had very much become a part of Peter’s life and ministry in the church as an elder. Peter may have been with Jesus for the three years of his earthly ministry listening to his teaching, witnessing his miracles and then his suffering, while having been appointed by Jesus to be the Leader or chief apostle in a sense as the Rock on which the Lord would build the church, that’s Church with a Big ‘C’, the universal church, but Rocky or Peter identifies himself here with all the elders of the church in v1, as just another elder, one of you who are called, chosen, ordained and commissioned as God’s shepherds in the local churches of the people, the dear souls that make up their congregations, their flock.

Peter here is the example of fulfilling Christ's command as a shepherd caring for his flock by feeding his sheep just as he was told to do when Jesus reinstated Peter after he had denied Jesus three times before his crucifixion [John 21:15-19]. This was no new thing either because in the Old Testament, take Ezekiel 34:1-10 for example, the Lord used the same metaphor for shepherd to hold the leaders of Israel accountable for failing to take care of and be responsible for their flock, the people of Israel who were under their care.

As elder-shepherds of God's flock they had been given from God the responsibility to oversee, govern and rule while watching over, tending and supplying the requisite needs of the souls of the people in their flock under their care. And to do this job faithfully and well, now Peter, under Jesus and from his ongoing experience in life and walk of faith in the church, where he never did a perfect job as far as overseeing or watching over and feeding the flock was concerned, there was to be a certain attitude of heart and mind necessary for the elder to function in their role, beginning with...

### **Willingness**

The Attitude of heart is to be freely and willingly, as in the case of a volunteer, participating and doing something of their own accord, voluntary as opposed to being under compulsion to do as you must. This is the attitude of heart that God desires in the life and ministry of an elder-overseer, a shepherd of the flock under their care. The second important attitude to be of an Elder's mind is...

### **Eagerness**

A brisk and cheerful ready and willing attitude of your mind. It's something that you've pre determined and decided in your mind to be. And that's what Peter is saying, that as an elder-shepherd and overseer of the flock, you are ready to serve above even other worldly pursuits and gain. And such an attitude of heart and mind, being eager to serve in this way is the opposite of 'Lording it over' which means in an overpowering way seek to subdue by domination and control those soul's, the sheep that God has entrusted into your care.

A catch cry of the PCANZ over the last 20 years has been “Servant Mission Leadership”. An elder’s ministry in the PCANZ is therefore to be a ‘serving ministry’ so that as a shepherd and overseer of God’s flock an elder is called to be a servant leader, just as Peter is informing elders and the flock alike, with a servant heart and mind attitude which is to show and therefore serve as an example to the flock which is the next thought of Peter of what an elder is to be...

### **Examples**

An example to be imitated that is worthy of imitation by another person, in this case a believer under the care of the elder-overseer-shepherd whose words and actions or behaviour is worthy of following. In this case we elders are to be willing and eager examples of Christ’s overseeing, caring and serving love for believers in his church, the flock.

### **A Message to All**

In reciprocation the flock according to Peter under the elders care are to make themselves accountable to these overseeing, willing and modern day examples of Christ by submitting themselves to the elders. It’s a relationship that works both ways and puts us on an equal footing in the church as believers as we would each and every one of us humble ourselves, clothing ourselves with humility toward one another.

Earlier I used the illustration and metaphor of Peter caring and feeding the sheep as an elder-overseer of the flock, but now in these last verses we have the theme of submission and humility which for Peter may very well have been based in his memories of the Last Supper which have been etched into and are playing out in his mind as he writes, for when Peter says ‘All of you clothe yourselves with humility toward one another’ and then states that we are to “humble ourselves”, we cannot deny the impact Jesus had on Peter when he put on an apron which is a badge of servitude and washed all the disciples feet in the upper room on the night of the Last Supper. But what happens when he gets to Peter’s feet? In John 13 in Peter’s exchange with Jesus he was quite rebellious in his tone towards him, “Are you going to wash my feet? You’ll never wash my feet. Well, then not just my feet but my hands and head as well” But now in his writing, as someone who was spiritually transformed

as he journeyed through Christ's Passion to the cross witnessing his suffering, death and subsequent resurrection and ascension to heaven, he has not only aged but has come a long way in his Christian spiritual journey as the apostle Peter, the Rock, the fellow elder who's made his appeal as a witness of Christ's sufferings, who will also share in the glory to be revealed, this is a man who speaks or writes now with great understanding. With his insight, grasping just what it means or what it will take to be the elder that Jesus wants him to be in His Church, which will always begin with humbling himself under God the Father, and clothing himself with humility, with a deep sense of modesty and having a humble opinion of himself, figuratively putting on the apron, the badge of servitude to serve willingly, eagerly just as Christ did in His example, lowering himself to get on his knees and joyfully partake in completing the dirtiest and most demeaning of all tasks in an ancient household, washing the dust, dirt and filth off the feet of your brothers and sisters. Elders especially, along with all of us in the flock under their care, we are all to humble ourselves to serve, not our own agendas and our own needs, but one another in humility because God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble and the mighty hand of God will always serve to lift us up at the proper time.

To the elders and the flock- let us all grow together as such a church based on Christ's humility as we relate to one another – each by our own eager, ready and willing example. An example that you and I should do just as Jesus has done for us. Now that we know these things, you and I will be blessed if we do them.