

Sermon for 6-5-11  
1 Peter 5:1-11

1 Peter began by defining the community formed by new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. 1 Peter then led us to examine how we live as this resurrection community. We live together in a new way not like we did before. There is love for one another, reverence for God. There is building up one another, there is blessing those who we are in relationship with outside of the community of faith. This resurrection life is summed up by loving, being hospitable, and serving empowered by God even in the midst of suffering.

1 Peter ends by talking about the role of leadership in the new community formed by faith in Jesus Christ and his resurrection.

The story began: “Who’s keeping order at the Erie County Correctional Facility in Alden? Apparently, it’s not always who you might think.” An inmate lost a tooth while breaking up a fight between two correctional officers at a New York prison a few weeks ago. They were reported to be fighting over a bag of potato chips. Corrections officers are supposed to provide a safe and secure environment for inmates. But, in this case, it was an inmate trying to provide a safe environment for officers. It’s not a good sign when it’s the inmate doing the clear thinking.<sup>1</sup>

Living as part of any type of community we need leadership to guide us. We need those we respect to oversee our living. We are not perfect. Even if we believe in Jesus and his resurrection we need support, challenge, encouragement and accountability as we live for him.

Peter calls those who oversee the new community, elders. (Our congregation is led by a board of elders of which the pastor is one.) Peter held himself up as an example of an elder. He witnessed Christ’s sufferings, both as a result of his sin of denying Jesus and as he faced difficulty because he followed Jesus. Peter shares in the glory to be revealed through the forgiveness of Christ. The tone is set for leadership in the new community. Leadership in the resurrection community knows, sin, suffering, and forgiveness.

Peter gives exhortation to elders. Tend the flock. Exercise oversight. [So the next door neighbor doesn’t have to separate the church folk from fighting over something that is ultimately trivial.] The leaders of the resurrection community protect, lead, feed, guide. The leaders make sure that those in the community follow Jesus and grow in faith. Having leaders is vital, but the position can be abused.

There are 3-‘not, buts’ that describe the exercise of leadership in the church. 1) Not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you do it; 2) Not for gain, but eagerly; 3) Not lording it over those in your charge, but be examples to flock.

The motivation for leadership is from God. A leader is not pressured by others in the community to have a church office. A leader does not carry out their office just to please others in the community. A leader does not let feelings of personal inadequacy drive them. A leader does what God would have one do. A leader tends the flock of God that is in their charge.

A leader does not seek sordid gain. A leader does not just work if there is a perceived personal gain. A leader is willing to carry out the work, despite difficulty. A leader serves eagerly that others may gain faith in Jesus.

A leader does not domineer, delighting in authority. A leader does not try to preserve or increase power, trying to raise one's status. A leader does not use threats or intimidation. A leader gains power from having a life and faith in God that is worthy of being imitated.

Ultimately we are not to forget that Jesus brings reward/glory for our love, hospitality, and service in the community of faith and in the world. This realization does not bring pride, but humility. The opportunity for spiritual leadership, effective spiritual leadership comes from obeying God.

Just as the elders are asked to obey God in their leadership, those who may chaff at leadership (the example given in 1 Peter is of those who are younger) are asked to follow the elders. Humility is the key ingredient in leadership and in the resurrection community. Humility is an attitude that puts others first. Peter uses the image of a slave putting on an apron before serving, as he says 'all of you clothe yourselves with humility.' Not some, or most, or just the leaders, or just the younger, but all are to deal with one another with humility

Humility thinks of the desires, needs, ideas of others as more worthy of attention than our own. Humility helps others to achieve great things. A Christian leader writes, "If I appear great in their eyes, the Lord is most graciously helping me to see how absolutely nothing I am without Him, and Helping me to keep little in my own eyes. He does use me. But I am so concerned that He uses me and that it is not of me the work is done. The axe cannot boast of the trees it has cut down. It could do nothing but for the woodsman. He made it, he sharpened it, and he used it. The moment he throws it aside; it becomes only old iron. O that I may never lose sight of this."

In and of ourselves we are sinners not fit for leadership or membership in the resurrection community. We can't say we are good enough or able to be a leader without God. There are two sides to pride here: the celebration of self with out need for others or for God, or deciding that we can't serve without listening to others or to God. We all need to receive grace from God that we might serve him.

We can indeed cast our anxieties on our Lord, because he cares for us. The care of God empowers us in faithfulness. When we have the fear especially in leadership of being insignificant, stepped on, not cared for we can turn to God. Even when an elder of a member fails we can turn to our Lord. Even when our cares and anxieties overwhelm and make a barrier to putting others first, we can turn to God. Who will see to my needs? God will.

God's sovereign care however cannot be an excuse for inactivity. Elders don't say God is taking care of everything so I don't have to exercise leadership. Leaders are disciplined, staying firm in faith and encouraging others to do so. They know the devil looks to devour our hope. When we have no hope, all our energy gets focused on ourselves. Our suffering leads to

repaying others with abuse. Our position leads to pride focus on other's evil, ignoring our own. Our anxiety leads to conflict in the community.

The resurrection community led by its elders reacts differently than those who do not have faith in Jesus or in his resurrection. We consider God's perspective. We have confidence in faith in the midst of suffering, evil, and conflict. God's care for us allows us to think of others. And we elders and members of God's resurrection community alike called by God will experience how God restores, supports, strengthens, establishes us that all might know his power.

God forms the resurrection community and he calls us all to participate. We are gathered to serve, not to be served. Our elders remind us of this. We look to the example of our leaders who continually turn to God in prayer and grow in their understanding of God through the Bible. Our elders oversee the resurrection community that is Bell Memorial so that its witness of love hospitality and service among one another and its actions that bless others will consistently point to Jesus Christ. To him be the power forever and ever Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.buffalonews.com/editorial-page/buffalo-news-editorials/article413817.ece>