



Faithful & Afire

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies 2011-2012

Leader's Guide

Leader Guides

Table of Contents

September 2011 – “The Shepherd as Sheep”	1
October 2011 – “The Shepherd with Ears to Hear”	7
November 2011 – “Shepherding within the Path to Green Pastures and Still Waters”	13
December 2011 – “The Shepherd and the Wolves”	20
January 2012 – “Private Confession & Absolution for the Under-shepherd”	28
February 2012 – “The Shepherd’s Heart for the Lost, Wandering, and Wayward Sheep”	35
March 2012 – “Shepherding Through the Contradictions”	40
April 2012 – “The Shepherd’s Purpose”	47
May 2012 – “Shepherding the Flock”	53



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LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2011-2012
The Under-Shepherd – Under the Cross

Leader's Guide

September 2011

THE UNDERSHEPHERD – UNDER THE CROSS: ‘

“The Shepherd as Sheep”

1. Focus of This Study

This Bible study has the title, “The Shepherd as Sheep.” At best, that seems like a contradiction. Shepherd and sheep are two distinctly different creatures and have distinctly different roles. Is it possible for shepherds to understand themselves as sheep?

The Scriptures speak of those who have been entrusted with certain leadership roles in God's kingdom as shepherds. At various times, that includes kings, priests, and prophets of the Old Testament Israel. Then, in the New Testament, there are the pastors of the New Israel, the Church. The word *pastor*, taken directly from the Latin, literally means shepherd. Yet the Scriptures speak of *all* of those who are God's people as sheep. The great “shepherd king” David certainly recognizes his dual identity as he confesses: “The Lord is my Shepherd.” For him who was chosen by God to lead the People of Israel as a shepherd, it is most natural for David to see himself also as a sheep who depends on the gracious guidance and care of his Good Shepherd (cf. Ps. 23). For David, there is no tension between being a shepherd and being a sheep at the same moment.

In the Christian faith, we live with the reality that many matters of faith and life cannot be categorized by what may be called an “either/or polarity.” The very nature of Christ is the most obvious example. Scripture teaches and the Church confesses that “it is the right faith that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is at the same time both God and man” (Athanasian Creed, 28). No “either/or” there! Luther's understanding, based on Scripture, that a believer in Christ is *simil iustus et peccator* is another prime example. A believer is neither at one moment solely a sinner condemned under the Law, nor in a different moment a purely righteous individual justified by Christ. Rather, like the Apostle Paul, a believer is aware of his “wretched” nature, but at the same time is even more aware that in Christ there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (cf. Rom. 7:24 – 8:1).

God and man. Saint and sinner. Shepherd and sheep. All at the same instant.

For those of us who are called as pastors – undershepherds of the great Good Shepherd Jesus Christ – it is incumbent upon us that we never lose sight of our dual status. While we are called to keep watch over “all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made [us] overseers” (cf. Acts 20:28), we must never lose sight of the reality that we have exactly the same spiritual needs as the sheep in the flock which has been entrusted to us.

In this study, we who are shepherds are reminded that like the sheep under our care, we are constant beggars before God and, at the same time, we are the perpetual recipients of the gifts of God.

For Discussion

- As pastors, we are both shepherd and sheep. As we stand before God as beggars, how are our needs as both shepherd and sheep the same?

Passages such as Romans 3:23 make no distinction – all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. It is recorded that on February 16, 1546, just two days before his death, Martin Luther penned his last written words: “We are all beggars. It is true.” The Apostle Paul, as well, noted that he was the “foremost of sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15).

How do our needs in each role differ?

For those who are called into the public ministry, there are greater expectations and greater accountability (cf. James 1:3). Later in this study, we will discuss the different roles of the office of the pastoral ministry and the priesthood of all believers. (Do not get bogged down at this point in the study.)

- We are both shepherd and sheep. Recognizing our differing and often distinctive gifts and personalities, in which role do we find ourselves the most comfortable? Please explain why.

(This is a rather subjective question. Some brothers may feel very much at ease in a shepherding role due to experience or personality. Others may feel some reluctance or uneasiness in a shepherding role. The next section of the study will provide some encouragement for all. You may wish to affirm all the brothers recognizing the variety of gifts they have been given.)

- Is it possible that our identity as sheep (with faults and weaknesses) among the other sheep in our flock *lessen* their perception or understanding of the shepherding authority we are called to exercise in the Office of Undershepherd? Explain.

Both this question and the next may say more about our perceptions of ourselves and our office than about the perceptions of others. It is critical that the discussion include the understanding that every shepherd exercises his authority solely by virtue of the office he has been called to rather than his own personage. Allow personal anecdotes, but again, do not get bogged down.

- Might our identity as sheep among the other sheep in our flock *enhance* their perception of us as their shepherd? Explain.

2. Scripture Search

Read Exodus 3:1 – 4:17

God identifies Himself to Moses and reveals His plan of rescue for His people. However, when God calls Moses from tending his flock to leading the People of Israel, Moses begs God neither for the strength nor for the gifts necessary to lead or shepherd the People of Israel but rather that God would find someone else.

- What arguments (chapter and verse) does Moses give against this service to which he has been called?

3:11 – Moses asks, “Who am I?” He doubts both his own abilities and the trust of the people toward him. (Note: Contrast Moses question, “Who am I?” to God’s revelation that He is “I AM.”

3:13; 4:1 – Moses questions if the people will truly believe that God has sent him.

4:10 – Moses cites his lack of eloquence.

- Were these arguments valid?

Moses was not displaying false humility. In his mind, he saw himself as he was. His failure was to see that the God who was calling him would also provide for him.

- Identify in each instance God’s provision.

3:12 – God gives the promise of His presence. (You may wish to comment on the frequency of this promise throughout Scripture.)

3:14f – God identifies Himself as the God who *is* – the same God who provided for the patriarchs in the past will provide for the people in the future.

4:2-9 – God promises that He will provide “signs” (vs. 16) of His presence – signs that would be too great for Moses to do himself.

4:11-16 – God will provide the words Moses is to speak (cf. Luke 10:16 – “He who hears you hears me...”) and a spokesman in the person of Aaron, Moses’ brother.

Note: In every instance, God provides for the one He has called into His service.

- When we are called upon for the Lord’s service – either to the public ministry or to other projects or positions of responsibility within the public ministry, what arguments have we given against the service to which we have been called?

- Are our arguments ever valid? Why or why not?

Like Moses, our arguments may seem realistic and logical to ourselves. Yet, like Moses, we often fail to see the greater picture of God’s plan and His provision.

- Identify in your own ministry experience examples of God’s gracious provision.

Each of the brothers may have many examples. Allow some discussion, but limit the time on this.

Read Luke 10:1-3 and 2 Corinthians 2:14 – 3:6

It is incumbent upon every shepherd that he strive to be faithful (cf. 1 Cor. 4:1-2). Nonetheless, the devil is at work wherever the Gospel is preached. Jesus certainly had this in mind as he sent out the seventy-two: “I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves.”

It is a bit surprising that Jesus uses this analogy. In the pairing of lambs versus wolves, there is an expected outcome. Jesus, however, provides the unexpected.

Every shepherd will experience opposition and accusations about his preaching, his teaching, his pastoral abilities, and his general competency.

Rather feeling like shepherds who protect their sheep, occasionally pastors feel like sheep who are attacked by the wolves both outside and, sometimes, within the sheepfold.

After Paul’s departure from Corinth and following his first letter, false teachers called into question both his teachings and his qualifications as an apostle.

- In describing his ministry in Chapter 2:15, Paul descriptively contrasts the perspectives that people have toward those who spread the knowledge of Christ.

- In what instances have you been either the “stench of death” or the “fragrance of life”?

Perhaps some of the newer brothers will not have experienced these extremes, while some of the more experienced brothers will have had ample situations. A challenge for you as leader will be to encourage the “fragrance” stories, especially in light of the next question.

- How has this affected your perspective about shepherding your flock?
- In 2 Corinthians Chapter 3:4-6, Paul places the focus of his confidence concerning ministry not upon his own skills or abilities, but squarely upon God who provides in abundance.
 - Describe how this assurance serves those who are called to be shepherds, and specifically, how this assurance has and continues to serve you.

You may wish to encourage the brothers to commit these verses to memory. While they are a parallel to Philippians 4:13, these are more specifically addressed to those who are called as shepherds.

- If our competency is “from God,” might this excuse us from the responsibility to develop deeper understanding of the Scriptures and the Confessions or to develop specialized skills for pastoral care, for outreach, or other aspects of ministry? Do these not come automatically (cf. 2 Tim. 2:15)?

Paul encourages Timothy to *strive with zeal* or to *make haste (spoudason)* to show himself as an approved workman, rightly handling the word of truth. This in an imperative, not a passive word. Interestingly, Jesus asks for prayers to send out *laborers* into the harvest. While God provides the competency, His expectation is that we will not be prodigals.

Read Isaiah 53:1-7; Ezekiel 34:1-10; John 10:12-13 &15

Through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord gives various pictures of the Suffering Servant. He is like a shoot and a root (Is. 53:2; cf. Is. 11:1-10). He is a man of sorrows (Is. 53:3). He is a lamb and a sheep (Is. 53:7). The One who identifies Himself as the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep (cf. John 10:11,15) becomes one of the sheep in order to give Himself as sacrifice for the other sheep who have gone astray (Is. 53: 5-6).

- As shepherds, we are also sheep who have gone astray. Rather than the faithful shepherd who searches and finds the lost sheep of our flock (cf. Lk. 15:3-7), at times through our own sinfulness we have, like the shepherds of Israel, been more concerned about ourselves (cf. Ez. 34:2-6). We have not always strengthened the weak, or bound up the injured, or searched for the lost. Like the hireling of John 10:12, at times we have fled from the flock rather than confronting the wolves that have come to us in various forms.

This paragraph speaks Law. A temptation for all of us is to direct that Law toward certain others. While there will always be examples of others whose ministry has suffered, each of us must confront and confess our own failures. It is critical that the brothers embrace the truthfulness of this or Christ’s forgiveness will not bring them the comforting relief it brings to all who humbly repent.

- From what “wolves” have you fled?

While you may not wish to highlight one brother over against another, it is helpful for each of us to confront our own wolves. Knowing our enemy is the first step in preparing to do battle.

- Jacob, who was also a shepherd, confessed to God, “I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies...Thou hast shown unto Thy servant” (Gen. 32:10). The Apostle Paul, confessed that he was a “wretched man” (Rom. 7:24) and the “chief of sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15). How can our own sinful expectations of ourselves or the sinful expectations of others prevent us from honest confession?

(Sometimes the pedestal we've set up for ourselves or that others, with noble intent, have set up for us prevent us from showing our weaknesses, our fears, our lack of trust in God's provision, or admitting our failures. Highlight the honesty of the Pauline verses, as well as the clear message of God's grace that is connected with each – Romans 8:1; 1 Timothy 1:16.)

- Dare we, as “shepherds of God's flock” that is under our care (1 Pet. 5:2) and “examples to the flock” (1 Pet. 5:3) confess before our flock that we are “poor, miserable sinners”?

(The above Pauline references provide an excellent example.)

- Jesus is the Good Shepherd who also becomes the Lamb led to slaughter (Is. 53:7) for the sheep of His flock, for other sheep (John 10:16), and for us. In the vision of the multitudes in heaven given in Revelation 7, all who enjoy the triumph of eternal life are those sinners who “have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (14). Jesus is the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29) by His sacrificial death on the cross and His triumphant resurrection from the dead. However, He is also the Shepherd of Psalm 23, Ezekiel 34:23-24, and Revelation 7:14 who in His ascension and exaltation leads and blesses His flock now and forever.
 - We are blessed beyond measure. As sheep, our Good Shepherd has sought us out when we were lost or straying, and through His Sacraments and Word has enfolded us into His flock and continually gathers us to Himself. He has laid down His life for us and has risen again. He has forgiven us. He leads us. He cares for us. He also feeds, nourishes, and refreshes us through His Word and Sacraments. He gives us the confidence of life eternal. In addition, as shepherds, He has entrusted us to be stewards of His life-giving Word and Sacraments, equipping and empowering us by the Holy Spirit. Describe the impact on you, as a shepherd, from knowing first-hand the grace and gifts of Jesus to you as a sheep.

3. From Our Lutheran Perspective

For reflection or conversation

Depending upon the makeup of your circuit, there may be special sensitivities in this section. Please take care not to diminish the honor of the divinely established office of the pastoral ministry. Yet, do not allow the holding of the pastoral office obscure the reality that each of us who hold this office continue to be beggars.

- Lutherans, perhaps better than any others, understand the special relationship between the pastoral ministry (shepherds) and the priesthood of all believers (sheep). While not all sheep in the flock are called to be shepherds, all shepherds are still part of the sheep. While we honor the pastoral ministry (Predigtamt) as “the highest office in the church” (cf. Church and Ministry, Part Two, Thesis VIII), we also recognize that “The ministry is not a special or, in opposition to that of ordinary Christians, a more holy state...but it is a ministry of service” (cf. Church and Ministry, Part Two, Thesis IV). We are also familiar with the words of one of Luther's Sacristy Prayers: “Lord God, You have appointed me as a Bishop and Pastor in Your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked Your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon You: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon Your Word. Use me as Your instrument -- but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”
 - Discuss the danger when shepherds fail to see themselves also as sheep, both in failing to recognize that “we are all beggars,” and in failing to recognize that we all are the perpetual recipients of God's grace, guidance, and blessings.

4. Points to Ponder

- Occasionally, a birthing ewe will reject one of its newborn lambs, especially in the instance of a multiple birth. Likewise, from time to time, a ewe will die giving birth. The result is a “bummer lamb.” Left to itself and without its mother’s nurture and nourishment, the bummer lamb will die. From time to time, another lamb in the flock will die during or shortly after its birth. Because ewes bond with their newborn lambs, in part due to the scent of their lambs, a ewe normally will not adopt a bummer lamb with its foreign scent. An age-old practice is to cover the bummer lamb with the hide of a lamb that has died and bring that lamb to the ewe. Smelling the scent of her own lamb, a ewe will allow the bummer lamb to nurse and, within a couple of days, will adopt the bummer lamb even when the dead lamb’s hide is removed.
 - While this lambing illustration is not specifically given in Scripture, what may be applications for us in our role as sheep and as shepherds?

We know that all of us were born spiritually blind, *dead*, and at enmity with God. Yet in Baptism, we have “put on Christ” [Gal. 3:27]. Through *His* death and resurrection, we have been given the “newness of life” [Rom. 6:4] and have been made acceptable to God. Whether as sheep or shepherds, our life is dependent upon the sacrifice of the Lamb of God – a gift that has truly saved us.

5. For Conversation

- “In my last church, my pastor preached as if he were preaching to himself as well as to the congregation. He included the words ‘we’ and ‘us’ throughout his sermons. In my new church, the pastor almost never speaks about ‘we’ and ‘us,’ but almost always uses the word ‘you.’ While I know that he is God’s messenger to the people of the congregation, it seems that he’s setting himself above the rest of us.” This comment by a faithful layperson is not uncommon when there has been a change of pastors. Different pastors not only have different preaching styles, they have reasons for their different styles. Remember the “either/or” polarity mentioned at the beginning of this study. Sometimes that polarity manifests itself in our sermons. Preachers are God’s messengers (cf. Lk. 10:16, Mt. 10:40; Jn. 20:21-13). Often, in Scripture, God’s messengers address their hearers with the second person ‘you’ (cf. 2 Sam. 12:7; Acts 2:22-14; 7:51; Luke 2:10-12). But His messengers also frequently use the first person words ‘I’ and ‘me’ and ‘we’ and ‘us’ (cf. Rom. 5:1-8; 7:4-25; 2 Cor. 5:1-10; Jas. 3:2-3; 1 Jn. 4:7ff). Sometimes, in the course of the same message, they use both the first and second person (cf. Gal. 3:23-27; 1 Pet. 1:3-9).
 - Shepherds as sheep, like all the rest of the sheep, are constant beggars before God. Discuss how our preaching reflects both our own spiritual needs as well as the spiritual needs of the sheep to hear the Law in its full severity and the Gospel in all its sweetness.
 - Shepherds as sheep, like all the rest of the sheep, are perpetual recipients from God. Discuss how our preaching and our lives give testimony of God’s grace and providence both to us and the other sheep in His flock.

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Faithful & Afire

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2011-2012
The Under-Shepherd – Under the Cross

THE SHEPHERD WITH EARS TO HEAR
The Shepherd – Under the Law, Under the Gospel

Leader's Guide

1. Focus of This Study

Read the excerpts below and discuss them individually.

“Under the Cross.” The world does not want to hear about the cross – not the cross of Jesus with its blood and suffering and death, and not the cross of his followers with its patience and self-denial.

What does it mean for the pastor to be “under the cross”?

Answers will vary. Read the following excerpt from Colossians:

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. Col 1:24-26 (ESV)

An LCMS pastor once conducted a funeral for a faithful and active member. A relative of the deceased in attendance, a pastor in a Pentecostal denomination, asked the pastor afterwards, “I couldn't help but notice that you preached the Gospel; do you always preach the Gospel at funerals?” Our pastor, taken aback, replied, “I don't have anything else to say.”

In the midst of any funeral, the love a pastor has for those hurting often brings temptations to say more than given to say in the hopes of easing pain. Discuss how both the context and the goal of the sermon affect what the preacher is able to say and not say.

The Apostle Paul wrote, **“For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”** (1 Corinthians 2: 2).

What does it mean to the preacher to “know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified”?

This knowing goes beyond the fact the hearers are forgiven, it begins with knowing their absolute need for Christ crucified and this need limits what the pastor can proclaim.

How would the pastor knowing nothing about himself except this affect his hearing and proclaiming the Law and the Gospel?

It would be truly sad if any pastor does not know and understand himself solely in Christ crucified. If he does not understand himself this way, it will interfere with his ability to make the word of Law and Gospel applicable in the lives and hearts of his hearers.

Pastors from time to time get this question from people shaking hands at the end of the service: “Pastor, did you preach that sermon directly at me?” A good answer is “Yes.” Whether the preacher had that person specifically in mind or not, it hopefully was preached in such a way that each person present felt it was specifically for him or her. And if it’s truly a biblical sermon, rightly dividing Law and Gospel, it applies to everyone.

Give examples from your own experience of people commenting on how a sermon spoke clearly and directly to them.

With hearers ranging in age from birth through 80s or even 90s, and with diversity in vocations, culture, socio-economic standing, etc., what are some things the preacher can do to make it personal and applicable to all the hearers?

Have the brothers share helpful ideas. Always return to the importance of proclaiming the specific Gospel, even at the risk of being repetitive; but also search for helpful ideas on how to keep the same story fresh. Discuss also the implications of preaching to multi-cultural audiences. For those who say that has no bearing, remind them that even language is a cultural concession. For example, probably most of the brothers don’t preach in Mandarin. What other cultural concessions should and should not be made?

Since the under-shepherd is also a sheep of the Good Shepherd’s flock, does the preacher ever ask that question himself, “Was that sermon preached directly to me? Do the words of that sermon apply to me?”

The first hearer of any sermon must be the preacher. If the sermon arises from the convictions the text has laid on the pastor’s heart, it will make it much easier articulate the Law and Gospel in terms that speaks to the hearers. This will also allow the preacher to better hear the Gospel and apply it with real application to the hearers. Have the brothers share times when their sermon convicted them.

2. Scripture Search

Read the following texts and discuss them individually.

Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” Luke 24: 44–49

1. What does it mean and what does it sound like to proclaim repentance in Jesus’ name?
To proclaim forgiveness in Jesus’ name?
2. To whom should the parish pastor proclaim these messages and where?
3. In what way is the pastor a witness of these things?

Read or summarize the following:

The Mission of Christ is often described as suffering for our sins and rising again. That certainly is part of his mission, and it is mission accomplished, completely by him, all by himself, once and for all. However, there is a second part of his mission also, namely, proclaiming repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name to all nations. To be sure, the Holy Spirit does that, and the Holy Spirit alone brings lost people out of darkness and into the Light of Christ. However, there is a “both – and” tension: yes, the Holy Spirit does it all, and yes, the Lord involves his bride the church (believers) in carrying it out through the ministry of Word and Sacrament.

Faith comes through hearing. God uses men to proclaim his Word.

Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers. 1 Timothy 4: 16

1. What do people see when they look at you?
2. What is your example?
3. What do you do when no one is looking?
4. Are there things you do you do not want anyone to know? If so, how do those things affect you, your hearers, and your message?”

Answers will vary, but focus on serving in the presence of God.

But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified. 1 Corinthians 9: 27

Discuss helpful spiritual disciplines such as private devotions, prayer with your wife, fasting, silence, etc.

And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” Mark 2: 17

The preacher must be sure to listen to and take to heart himself the Word he preaches to others.

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6: 23

If John 3:16 is “The Gospel in a Nutshell,” then Romans 6: 23 is perhaps “The Law and the Gospel in a Nutshell.” How do you proclaim the 21 words of this passage in new and fresh yet unchangeable ways every week in your sermons?

There are very few actual sermons in the New Testament. Why do you suppose that is? Why does the Lord choose to pour out his treasure from “clay pots,” sinful human pastors? What advantages are there to being the wounded healer?

3. From Our Lutheran Perspective

Participants should read the following citations; encourage comments along the way.

“Practical and clear sermons hold an audience.” Apology XXIV.50

1. What is a “practical and clear sermon”?

“The Third Commandment. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. *What does this mean?* We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.” SC

1. How do preachers despise preaching and God’s Word? Lack of preparation? Too much time on other things, like blogging – or worse?

“The Second Petition. *How does God’s kingdom come?* God’s kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity. SC

“The Sixth Petition. *What does this mean?* God tempts no one. We pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice. Although we are attached by these things, we pray that we may finally overcome them and win the victory.” SC

“The Seventh Petition. *What does this mean?* We pray in this petition in summary, that our Father in heaven would rescue us from every evil of body and soul, possessions and reputation, and finally, when our last hour comes, give us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven.” SC

1. How does God use the preached Word to bring about all these things for which we pray?

“[B]elievers require the teaching of the law so that they do not fall back on their own holiness [B]elievers also require the teaching of the law regarding their good works.” FCFDVI.20, 21

“However, the law does not teach how and why the good works of believers are pleasing and acceptable to God The law demands total, perfect, pure obedience if it is to please God. Instead, it is the gospel that teaches that our ‘spiritual sacrifices’ are pleasing to God ‘through faith’ ‘because of Christ.’” FCFD VI.22

“...God the Holy Spirit does not effect conversion without means, but he uses the preaching and the hearing of God’s Word to accomplish it....” FCE p II.4

“...[W]here Christ is not preached, there is no Holy Spirit to create, call and gather the Christian church, apart from which no one can come to the Lord Christ.” LC The Creed.45

“So that despair does not develop out of the sorrow or terror of the law, the proclamation of the gospel must be added to it, so that there may be a ‘sorrow that leads to salvation’ (2 Cor. 7: 10).”

Walther’s *Law and Gospel*, Thesis III: “Rightly distinguishing the Law and the Gospel is the most difficult and the highest art of Christians in general and of theologians in particular. It is taught only by the Holy Spirit in the school of experience.”

We confess that preachers are to preach both justification and sanctification. There is always a tension here between legalism and Gospel reductionism.

Reprint the insights, quotations, or citations in the Participant’s Guide, and provide background, commentary, or application.

4. Points to Ponder

Lead discussion on these points.

- We have no other message than these two paradoxical truths: Sin and forgiveness, curse and promise, death and life, Law and Gospel, all in Jesus’ name.
- Every human being needs to hear these two paradoxical truths and they must be invited to hear them. (Remember, unbelievers are dead in their sins; they will not decide on their own to come and hear.)
- Every preacher is also a hearer.
- Woe to the hearer who does not respond to the Law; woe to the hearer who does not believe the Gospel.
- The Law is to be preached using all three of its uses, namely, curb, mirror and rule.

Retired homiletics professor Francis Rossow used to say words to this affect: “No matter how eloquent your sermon, no matter how pure the doctrine, no matter how

memorable the illustrations, if you have not clearly declared the vicarious atonement of Christ into the ears of your hearers you have not preached a Christian sermon; you've only given a speech."

5. For Conversation

Lead discussion on these questions.

Emphasize the question about highlighting sections of clear Gospel and clear Law in sermon notes. Encourage the brothers actually to do this in order to see if they are clearly proclaiming both and not just talking about them.

1. How often do your sermons bring terror to your own conscience and sweet comfort to your own heart? Can you give specific examples?
2. If a sermon has not clearly proclaimed the truth of Christ's vicarious atonement for all the hearers, has it really been a Christian sermon at all?
3. What is the difference between "preaching about the Gospel" and "preaching the Gospel"?
4. If someone took a highlighter to clear declarations of the vicarious atonement in your sermon notes, would anything be highlighted? What about clear and specific declarations of the Law?
5. How do we invite people to listen to God's two great truths (Law and Gospel)?
6. Discuss the concepts of the "alien work" and the "proper work" of the Holy Spirit (see FCFD V.11) and the implications for our preaching and other pastoral care.
7. What is the danger of preaching the third use of the Law? What is the danger of not preaching the third use of the Law?
8. Are you likely to err on the side of over-emphasizing either the Law or the Gospel?

Close the study with a time of prayer, led by one or led by many. Pray specifically for each pastor to hear Christ and him crucified and risen for the pastor and for the Holy Spirit to keep both the pastor and the believers strong in the true faith and so that many unbelievers may be brought out of darkness and into the Light of Christ.

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Faithful & Afire

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2011-2012
The Under-Shepherd – Under the Cross

SHEPHERDING WITHIN THE PATH

Path as Boundary, Direction, Goal, and Personal Expectation of the way.

Leader's Guide

1. Focus of This Study

Jesus gathered the Eleven for their seminary graduation. He makes it clear He has the right to send them, *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."* Then He sends them, *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations".* He sends them down paths He has chosen and marked, not paths of their own design, *"baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."* He gives encouragement to these shepherds in the critical work He has given: *"And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."* (Matthew 28:18-20 ESV)

But is that enough for us? Or do we seek to go outside or beyond the path that our Lord has laid out for our work as under-shepherds of His flock?

- Specifically, do we think that it is the Pastor's responsibility to keep congregants from sinning?
- To make the church numerically successful?
- Do I trust the means the Lord has promised to use?
- Do I seek to alter the Word of the Lord to make it more acceptable?

On the sacristy door where I serve are carvings of the faithful Apostles and Judas Iscariot. Only Judas is without a nimbus (halo). He became a shepherd *off the path, outside the bounds* the Lord gave him. He stole from the common treasury (John 12:6). He disdained the true good that honored Jesus (Mark 14:3-10). He believed that it was his responsibility to save himself (Matthew 27:3-5). He went to "his own place" (Acts 1:25) rather than the place the Lord had prepared for him as His sheep from the foundation of the world.

2. Scripture Search

Please read and discuss the following texts:

Luke 5:1-11

There is a great deal of comfort, encouragement, and direction for the Ministry of the word in this text.

This account of the great catch of fish is framed by the proclaiming of the Word of Christ, which is precisely the way Jesus and the Apostles will catch men alive. The account begins with Jesus preaching at the shore and then in Simon Peter's boat. The account ends with Jesus' absolution and call of Simon: "Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men alive."

In the center of this account is Simon's statement: "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." It is important to note that everything Simon Peter knew as a professional fisherman told him it was pointless to fish now and in this way. Simon calls Jesus "Master" at this point (not "Lord" as he will after the catch).

What do Peter's words, "But at your word" reveal about the basis of his actions?

"But at your word"—this is a critical phrase. Simon acts not in accord with what he knows and understands; he acts solely by the word of Jesus!

What is the difference between the hard work Simon had done all night in catching nothing and in this almost too successful haul of fish?

The word of Jesus directed the latter.

There is a critical difference between how Peter and his company caught fish (by net and large numbers) and how the vast majority of people think of catching fish today (fishing pole - one by one). What difference does this make in the efforts of the pastor and means he employs to catch fish?

The fishing in the text is done by the casting of nets. It is not to be confused with sport fishing where hooks are hidden under night crawlers or decoyed by lures. Jesus simply preaches the word, which is casting out a net to pull many out of death into life, to catch many alive. This is how Jesus will send the Apostles as well.

Who is responsible for Simon Peter's big haul of fish? What did Jesus give Peter that moved him on to his successful catch?

Jesus is responsible for Simon's success. If it were not for His word, Simon would not have cast out the net. It is also true, if Simon had refused to follow Jesus' word, the catch would not have happened either. True mission work in Christ's kingdom is to trust our Lord's direction, cast out the word of the Gospel, and let Him be responsible for its success.

How is Simon Peter's reaction to the miraculous catch similar to Isaiah's reaction to the heavenly vision in Isaiah 6 and why?

Simon's reaction to the miraculous catch is similar to Isaiah's reaction to his heavenly vision (Isaiah 6). He confesses his sinfulness. Jesus' answer is absolution: "Do not be afraid;" and sending for Peter "from now on you will be catching men."

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS TO ASK AS DISCUSSION CONCLUDES:

In what ways does the ministry humble you?

When have you been tempted to go off the path the Lord has given to us (to mix a metaphor), and throw away the net our Lord has given and seek a bait-and-switch approach to catching men?

What encouragement and comfort does our Lord provide for us pastors in this text?

Luke 8:4-15

Is the Lord selective in where he sows?

The Lord widely sows the seed of His word. It lands practically everywhere. He does not place seeds singularly into each receptive spot.

If one wanted to focus on the numbers, what percentage of the seed sown actually produces the sower's desired results?

How might the low percentage of return tempt the shepherd to be more selective in both WHERE he sows and WHAT he sows?

25% of the seed actually accomplishes the desired result. Our Lord prepares us that the results of preaching Christ can be quite disappointing. There are those who never take it to heart, those who fall away in time of testing, and those who are choked off by the good and bad of this world. Nevertheless, the miraculous power of His saving word is shown in the harvest.

This text encourages us not to give up because so much seed seems unfruitful. Consider Martin Franzmann's hymn *Preach You the Word* (LSB 586, LW 259, note: the LSB version contains a stanza, 5, concerning the successful harvest) as a brief sermon on this text.

The path of our calling is to continue proclaiming the word of Christ no matter how the condition of the soil may appear to us.

1 Timothy 4:13-16

What are the contours of the path the pastor is to continue in his ministry?

In this text, the path for our ministry is clearly marked. We are to continue in the public reading of scripture, preaching, and teaching. This is what we were called to do when placed into the Holy Ministry by the laying on of hands.

What are the important implications for every pastor in the admonition: *“Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.”*

Keep a close watch (This same word in the Greek is used in Acts 3:5 to describe the crippled beggar. He was told by Peter and John to look at them. Then he watches them carefully, expectantly.) It is critical that we continue to watch ourselves and our teaching. We are sinful men who face many temptations. Many of us know pastors who have failed either personally or in leaving the Gospel of Christ. We are called to constantly examine ourselves and our teaching to make sure both are staying on the path to which the Lord has called us.

Which is a bigger challenge to you personally: watching yourself or watching your teaching?

How can we help one another in this watching?

Answers will vary but this is not an either/or question or answer, it is and must always be a both/and issue all the way.

1 Corinthians 4:1-2

While we understand that the steward is to manage his master’s household with the goods his master provides, is the steward free to manage his master’s household with goods other than those his master gave him and charged him to manage?

A steward does not own the master’s goods, he manages them as the master wants them managed. Pastors are managers who are charged with the distribution of our Lord’s goods. The heart of this calling is to be faithful to our Lord’s sending.

2 Corinthians 3:4-6

The Lord makes it clear that our sufficiency and competency as ministers of a new covenant comes from the Lord Himself. What then is the only way that any part of our ministry will be sufficient and competent?

Everything that makes us sufficient or adequate as ministers is from God and that is the Gospel of Christ (“new covenant”, “Spirit”, “ministry of righteousness”).

It is our Lord’s Word alone that makes our ministry of any importance. Apart from this Word, we are nothing and our ministry is equally nothing.

3. From Our Lutheran Perspective

Augsburg Confession, Article V: The Ministry

“So that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. Through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given [John 20:22]. He works faith, when and where it pleases God [John 3:8], in those who hear the good news that God justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ’s sake. This happens not through our own merits, but for Christ’s sake.

Our churches condemn the Anabaptists and others who think that through their own preparations and works the Holy Spirit comes to them without the external Word.” (Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions)

Notice how clearly the path for the ministers of the Gospel is confessed in this simple article from the Augsburg Confession.

How is the Holy Spirit given?

Who is responsible for working faith?

What is the pastor's responsibility as implied in this article?

Guide the discussion back toward the article for answers.

Augsburg Confession, Article VII: The Church

“Our churches teach that one holy Church is to remain forever. The Church is the congregation of saints [Psalm 149:1] in which the Gospel is purely taught and the Sacraments are correctly administered. For the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree about the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. It is not necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies instituted by men, should be the same everywhere. As Paul says, “One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all” (Ephesians 4:5-6).” (Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions)

Why must the basis/means of the true unity of the Church also be of the same basis/means which our Lord uses make and sustain the one true Church?

The Church's marks are the very means by which the Holy Spirit creates and sustains faith: “the Gospel is purely taught and the Sacraments are correctly administered.” To know the true Church one must know the works of God by which He makes the Church one with Christ. One is not possible without the other.

The Large Catechism, On the Third Article of the Creed:

“Until the last day the Holy Spirit remains with the holy community or Christian people. Through it, he gathers us, using it to teach and preach the Word. By it he creates and increases sanctification, causing it daily to grow and become strong in the faith and in the fruits of the Spirit.

Further we believe that in this Christian church we have the forgiveness of sins, which is granted through the holy sacraments and absolution as well as through all the comforting words of the entire Gospel. Toward forgiveness is directed everything that is to be preached concerning the sacraments and, in short, the entire Gospel and all the duties of Christianity. Forgiveness is needed constantly, for although God's grace has been won by Christ, and holiness has been wrought by the Holy Spirit through God's Word in the unity of the Christian church, yet because we are encumbered with our flesh we are never without sin.

Therefore everything in the Christian church is so ordered that we may daily obtain full forgiveness of sins through the Word and through signs appointed to comfort and revive our consciences as long as we live. Although we have sin, the Holy Spirit sees to it that it does not harm us because we are in the Christian church, where there is full forgiveness of sin. God forgives us, and we forgive, bear with, and aid one another.” [Tappert, Theodore G.: *The Book of Concord : The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Philadelphia : Fortress Press, 2000, c1959, p. 119.]

What comfort is afforded pastors in these brief paragraphs?

These paragraphs offer great comfort to pastors. Luther reminds us the church will remain to the end because of the Holy Spirit's work of teaching and preaching the word. Because we are always sinners in need of forgiveness, the Lord has set the path for the Christian Church and thus His called servants, to constantly deliver forgiveness. Every time we preach, there are sin-burdened hearers who need Christ's forgiveness delivered to them, just as we need it ourselves.

Luther's Lectures on Galatians 1535, on Galatians 1:11-12

“This is why we continually teach that the knowledge of Christ and of faith is not a human work but utterly a divine gift; as God creates faith, so He preserves us in it. And just as He initially gives us faith through the Word, so later on He exercises, increases, strengthens, and perfects it in us by that Word. Therefore the supreme worship of God that a man can offer, the Sabbath of Sabbaths, is to practice true godliness, to hear and read the Word. On the other hand, nothing is more dangerous than to become tired of the Word. Therefore anyone who is so cold that he thinks he knows enough and gradually begins to loathe the Word has lost Christ and the Gospel. What he thinks he knows, he reaches only by speculation; and, as

St. James says, “he is like a man who observes his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like” (James 1:23–24). This is what is finally happening to the frivolous fanatics.

Therefore let every faithful person work and strive with all his might to learn this doctrine and keep it, and for this purpose let him employ humble prayer to God with continual study and meditation on the Word. Even when we have done ever so much, there will still be much to keep us busy. For we are involved, not with minor enemies but with strong and powerful ones, who battle against us continually, namely, our own flesh, all the dangers of the world, the Law, sin, death, the wrath and judgment of God, and the devil himself, who never stops tempting us inwardly with his flaming darts (Eph. 6:16) and outwardly with his false apostles, so as to overcome some if not all of us.” [Luther's Works, Vol. 26 : Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 1-4. Saint Louis : Concordia Publishing House, 1999, c1963 p. 64-65.]

What do you think of Luther's assessment: “Nothing is more dangerous than to become tired of the Word.”? What temptations could arise from being “tired of the Word”?

What does Luther claim the Lord gives us through His word? (*Moreover, just as He initially gives us faith through the Word, so later on He exercises, increases, strengthens, and perfects it in us by that Word. Therefore the supreme worship of God that a man can offer, the Sabbath of Sabbaths, is to practice true godliness, to hear and read the Word.*)

To Luther the path for the under-shepherds is striving “with all his might to learn this doctrine and keep it, and for this purpose let him employ humble prayer to God with continual study and meditation on the Word.”

How do you maintain time for prayer, study, and meditation on the word?

Luther's Lectures on Galatians 1535, on Galatians 2:14

“Therefore let every Christian follow the example of Paul's pride here. Let love bear all things, believe all things, hope all things (1 Cor. 13:7). Let faith, by contrast, bear absolutely nothing; but let it rule, command, triumph, and do everything. For love and faith are exact opposites in their intentions, their tasks, and their values. Love yields even in trifles and says: ‘I bear everything and yield to everyone.’ But faith says: ‘I yield to no one; but everything must yield to me—people, nations, kings, princes, and judges of the earth.’ As Ps. 2:10–11 says, ‘Now, therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, etc. If you do not, you will perish in the way.’” [Luther's Works, Vol. 26 : Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 1-4. Saint Louis : Concordia Publishing House, 1999, c1963 p. 119]

While love bears all things, is it possible for faith to yield to anything other than the Word of God?

Luther contrasts love and faith. Love bears all things. Faith yields in nothing and to nothing . Faith sticks solely with the Word of our Lord no matter what.

4. Points to Ponder

- Simon Peter's “but at Your Word I will let down the net” is a perfect motto for all Christians, including pastors. It confesses that the Lord's Word may be at odds with our personal experience, but His Word is all that matters. Success is completely the Lord's responsibility.
- The Lord has called pastors to faithfully baptize and teach. It is His responsibility to cause the harvest.
- “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 15:58 NKJV)

This passage is the interesting conclusion to Paul's resurrection chapter, 1 Corinthians 15. The real, physical resurrection of Jesus and of His followers, results in the absolute certainty that “your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”

There are brother pastors who are suffering in very difficult situations. This passage offers direction: “be steadfast, immovable, always abounding the work of the Lord” and great comfort: “knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”

How often have you been tempted to think your labor is in vain?

“Be steadfast, immovable,” seems to fit well with the quote from Luther on Galatians 2:14 and with Jesus’ words in Matthew 28:20 “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

5. For Conversation

1. What boundaries mark the path according to these questions from the Ordination rite (*LSB Agenda*)? In what way is the path broad? In what way is the path narrow?
 - a) Do you promise that you will perform the duties of your office in accordance with these Confessions, and that all your preaching and teaching and your administration of the Sacraments will be in conformity with Holy Scripture and these Confessions?
 - b) Will you faithfully instruct both young and old in the chief articles of Christian doctrine, will you forgive the sins of those who repent, and will you promise never to divulge the sins confessed to you? Will you minister faithfully to the sick and dying, and will you demonstrate to the Church a constant and ready ministry centered in the Gospel? Will you admonish and encourage the people to a lively confidence in Christ and in holy living?
 - c) Finally, will you honor and adorn the Office of the Holy Ministry with a holy life? Will you be diligent in the study of Holy Scripture and the Confessions? And will you be constant in prayer for those under your pastoral care?
2. What expectations do you think some in the Holy Ministry have for themselves that are beyond the path on which the Lord leads us? What expectations do others have for pastors that are beyond the path the Lord has marked for us? As a pastor, what unbiblical goals have you had for yourself, or been tempted to have for yourself?
3. What do you think of Luther’s advice to Joachim Mörlin?

Letter from Luther to Joachim Mörlin, October 2, 1544

To the esteemed gentleman, the Rev. Joachim Mörlin, doctor of theology, faithful bishop of the church in Göttingen, my beloved brother in the Lord: grace and peace in Christ.

Dear Doctor:

I marvel that you think it necessary to consult me, as if you did not know what you should preach. Do you not have the Law and the Gospel? According to thesis the Word of God must be rightly divided in order that you may wound and heal, kill and make alive. Perhaps you hope in vain that all will hear and love the Word, or perhaps you center attention on the Law to the exclusion of the Gospel, so that the people think that they are listening to you instead of to God or feel that they are being subjected to compulsion. Be satisfied if a quarter of the ground receives the seed—unless you think yourself better than Christ or than Elijah, who was content with seven thousand. Be gentle with those who are gentle, and let those who resist your preaching of the Law quarrel with God about it, just so that you have done your duty. They may read the Scriptures for themselves if they do not believe you. The times are constantly getting worse, and many will turn from the truth.

Beyond this there is nothing that I can write. You yourself know the Scriptures.

Farewell in the Lord, and pray for us.

Yours,

Martin Luther, Doctor.

Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel, Theodore G. Tappert trans. and ed., Regent College Publishing: Vancouver, British Columbia, pages 310-311.

4. In some circuits pastors gather early in each week to study the texts for the coming Sunday. Would such a gathering be possible here? What might be the advantages of such joint preparation?

Closing

Consider praying together *Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord* by either singing or speaking. (LSB 497,
Stanzas 2 & 3 were added by Luther to this beautiful hymn/prayer)

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Faithful & Afire

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2011-2012

The Under-Shepherd – Under the Cross

THE SHEPHERD AND THE WOLVES

Leader's Guide

1. Focus of This Study

The Christian pastor holds the greatest office of human responsibility in all creation. He is called to preach the Word, to teach the truth to God's people, to lead God's people in worship, to tend the flock as a caring shepherd, and to mobilize the church for Christian witness and service. The pastor's role also includes an entire complex of administrative and leadership tasks. Souls are entrusted to his care, the truth is entrusted to his stewardship, and eternal realities hang in the balance. Who can fill this job description?

Of course, the answer is that no man can fulfill this calling. The Christian pastor must continually acknowledge his absolute dependence upon the grace and mercy of God. As the apostle, Paul instructs us, we are but earthen vessels employed for God's glory. On his own, no man is up to this task.

Changes in the life of the contemporary church have produced a crisis of identity for many pastors and teachers. Thus, it is imperative that the pastor be clear as to his function and place in the body of Christ. His principal task is to edify the church by spiritual feeding. No one can ever overestimate the importance of the edification of God's people through regular and systematic teaching and preaching of His Word and the faithful administration of His Sacraments. A seminal Scripture for thought is Acts 9: 31 where Luke explains that, after Saul's conversion, "the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord." The implication is that as the church was strengthened spiritually, so it grew numerically. Such growth took place in a culture and spiritual context that was informed by the Old Testament Scriptures, especially Genesis 1-3. These three chapters inform and set the context for the message of the Gospel. Such success was not enjoyed by Paul while preaching the same message to the crowds in Athens and those areas where Genesis 1-3 did not inform or set individual or community's context before the one true God. Since the church can only grow and flourish where the Word of God has free course and is honored, any uncertainty as to the place of pastors in the Church militates against the spiritual stability, discipline, prosperity, and growth of Christ's people. It is not surprising that Satan uses confusion concerning their place in the Church as a subtle ploy to harm her.

Because of the nobility of the calling, the pastor makes an easy target for Satan. The subtle enemy of our own sinful nature constantly tries to make us think that God's requirements concerning our life and character are either unimportant or altogether too familiar. This study will serve to remind us of the most important things even though we know them already (2 Pet. 1: 12-15). To this end, we will examine adversity in the ministry and how we pastors can face enormous challenges and setbacks to our ministry in terms of our personal lives. It will use Psalm 42 and 43 to "launch pad" these issues and the hope that lies within us.

2. Scripture Search

These Psalms 42 and 43 belong to a genre of literature within the Bible we call lament literature, where the writer is complaining either about himself or about things outside of himself and sometimes of God himself.

Here is a cameo sketch of a man who is in trouble. He finds the going difficult. He is surrounded by adversity. We could have gone to a New Testament equivalent, something like 2 Cor. 4 and 1 Cor. 4 where Paul is giving biographical information about his own ministry. Recall what Paul experienced on his journeys: beaten, imprisoned, and more. He was dragged outside the city and left by the roadside. Paul is in midst of adversity even when things are going well, and there is a sense in which you and I are as well. We are never away from it.

Some of you who read this are at your wits end. Come to a bible study like this, and you are heavy laden, wore out, tired, confused, feeling yourself to be a victim of sudden, unexpected, unwanted problems. In addition, some may be very personal. A marriage issue, children rebelling, maybe elders issue or church council. It might just be just difficult people.

We all have them. I certainly do. I have a member who can never be civil. His every communication is negative. I can tell him the time of day, and I have told it the wrong way. There are people like that. We can develop the Elijah syndrome where I say, "I am the only one left." Or perhaps, "I'm the only defender of the faith." Everybody is collapsing all around me.

Do a read through of Psalm 42 and 43.

1. What is your overall sense of what is happening in each?
2. What words does the writer use in each to describe his inner being?
 - Any words you may have used? If so, what context?

In reading these Psalms, I thought of a chapter in Spurgeon's "*lectures to my students, the minister's fainting fits.*" In addition, there are periods in our lives when we are prone to fainting fits. Sometime they come in midst of adversity. Sometimes they come for other reasons. Sometime they come because we have one, two, or three people who seem out to get us. At least this seems like our perception.

3. Ever had what you might call "fainting fits?" Not literally of course, but times when troubles and hardships got you so down you felt like it?
 - What were they? Are they? How did/do you handle them? How did they go away? How did/do you endure? .

Sometime these fainting fits come as result of a midlife spiritual, pastoral crisis. Maybe it seems like a loss of confidence in our gifting. It is amazing how many pastors can be the worst ones to encourage other ministers in their ministries and at the same time refuse the encouragement they might and do receive from other ministers and their own members.

- Why is it imperative that any and all of our encouragement begin and end with the Word of God?

These psalms have attracted preachers over the ages because of the intensely personal nature of them. In addition, these have been a great comfort to preachers who know the utter loneliness and hardship that are at times present in the pastoral office.

**VERSE-BY-VERSE LEADER'S GUIDE THOUGHTS/QUESTIONS
NOT IN PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE**

Psalm 42:1-2 He is in a dry place. As the deer pants for flowing streams. God has put him in a dry place. He is in a desert. The cool refreshing streams of spiritual refreshment at least for the present seem absent.

- Have you been there? Maybe there have only been a few conversions perhaps? Maybe you have seen very little change in the life of the congregation? You don't seem to be gaining in your own soul the same sense of joy and fulfillment that you once had?

It is a dry place. And the psalmist is panting for God. Notice, he says, for the living God. It is one thing to read about God. It's one thing to preach about God but yet another thing to have fellowship and communion with the living God.

- How often in the midst of this dry place, do you turn to God and receive Him almost solely in terms of systematic formulations? Does He become a propositional God?

While the systematic formations and catechismal truths are most glorious and blessings to us, they are not the Living Truth that has set us free. The most these can do is point to the Living Truth – Jesus Christ is even now at the right hand of God interceding for us.

Psalm 42:3 Where is he? He is in hostile territory. His enemies are saying where is your god. They are taunting him and mocking him. He is in enemy occupied territory.

- Does this surprise us as pastors?

This should not surprise us. Nevertheless, it seems to surprise us, especially because we are in the church. Somehow we forget that even though it's the Lord's church, that still sinners dwell in our midst and make ministry terribly difficult at times. We know they exist at a cognitive level to be sure. However, when their sinful nature shows up, as it does for us all, it can take us by surprise and make it terribly painful to minister.

- How has this taken you by surprise? Can you name some examples?

Even when in the church it seems that we are taken by surprise that attacks come our way.

Psalm 42:4 He is dislocated. What is he not doing anymore?

He is not with the people of God anymore. He is perhaps exiled from Palestine. He no longer can go to the feasts. He is in the Diaspora. He misses the people of God and the fellowship that comes from gathering together.

Psalm 42:6 He is now thinking of places he has visited in holy land. He is homesick.

- Ever been homesick in terms of your ministry? Desperately?

Psalm 42:7 He is threatened by being overwhelmed by trouble.

- Which of the Lord's prophets does this sound like in the throes of similar trouble?

Jonah uses this exact language while in the belly of the beast. It's the very same language used in Hebrew text. He is engulfed, swallowed by trouble and adversity.

Psalm 42:9. It seems that God has forgotten him. Have you ever felt that same way? Now you know it is not true, but feelings always seem to scream while the Lord whispers.

Your theology is better than that. You know that in your heads you are not forsaken by God. Consider doing a straw poll as to how many of would admit that in their hearts they have felt the same as the psalmist?

Our heads tell us one thing and our hearts will tell us another.

- *Why is the Word of God's promise key in the midst of these times?*

The Word alone is the power to create the faith and the work of the Spirit that enables us to hear and see things in terms of Christ's redeeming reality, rather than the undulations of our flesh in this fallen world.

That's also why it's so important, not just to preach to the head, but also necessary to preach to the affections. Because affections can so rule and govern the way we think.

There is a sense of the loss of reality here. It looks as though God had forgotten him. Now we know he is a thoroughly orthodox Lutheran. He is not writing a piece of heterodoxy; he knows that God can never abandon him. However, it feels like that. It feels as though God does not care.

- *How real is "theology of the Cross" in ministry and life?*

Many of us have been where the psalmist is. If you have praying for something or someone, for years, and not seen an answer, you get his hurt. Yes, I know the standard answer, God answers by saying no. I have preached that. Yet we still are praying. This is still my desire. And yet sometimes I think God does not hear me. He has forgotten me.

And when this happens at 2 a.m. It's not just a whisper, but like a thunderstorm that keeps you awake.

Psalm 43:1. Ungodly people, deceitful people and unjust men surround him. Yes, this can happen even in a good Lutheran church. There are people like that. In addition, people who seem bent on doing you harm and mischief. People who think they can get their own way because they have money and power. These are dark moments in life of the psalmist and the pastor.

Now ask yourself these questions: Is this man in a morbid state? Has it really got to him? Is he in an unhealthy state?

I think the answer is a yes and a no. Why?

I have been reading about William Cooper, the hymn writer. He lived in the same period as John Newton. Newton was his pastor. He was a melancholy individual; he broods and is a glass half-empty temperament and kind of person. He is an "Eyore." You remember what he says: "have a good day, which if it is a good day, which I doubt." We are like that at times. When Cooper was a young man, he proposed marriage to a cousin. It never took place. It shattered him. He was never the same again. When his mother died, he fell apart. On at least 4 occasions, he tried to take his life. On one occasion, he dove into river and it was only 4 inches deep.

Relationship between him and Newton was extraordinary. He was asking and crying the same questions that the psalmist was, and even as we all do.

There are passages like these that are dark in the Bible. Think of Job 3. We quote the first two chapters of Job, and then we love to quote Job's words to his wife, "shall we not accept good and not evil from the Lord?" We all want to be loved and we want that kind of response. We all want to say words like that. However, if we want reality then go to chapter 3 and all of a sudden, we see Job going down and this is a 747 going down. Moreover, he is cursing the day in which he was born, wishing that he had died in the womb.

The language of Job 3 is the language of most people following the funeral service when people have left and the phones stop ringing. They have plummeted down. When any of us are in the "trenches of life," what we think is real changes drastically. There is this outward front but inside we feel abandoned.

Yet in all of Job's cursings, he does not curse God for he knows, and he believes God to be the granter of what is happening to Him and as such the one who can also end what is happening to him.

Psalm 43:1-2: He is thirsting for the living God. What is the Psalmist not searching for in all this?

He is not thirsting for revenge. Good sign. It is so easy to concentrate on the negative here, that God seems far away but notice that he is not thirsting for revenge.

Psalm 43:3. He is mourning. There are tears, but what is he mourning about?

He is mourning over the paganism of society in which he lives. He is like Paul in Athens. When Paul saw the plethora of Greek and Roman gods on the acropolis, he is overwhelmed by this grief that he feels. Calvin said, "Man's mind is a perpetual factory of idols." Sin is idolatry. Kierkegaard said "God made man in his own image, after that, man makes god in his own image." Moreover, Paul sees that in Athens.

Psalm 43:4. Psalmist sees the same thing. So what does he do? He prays.

- *Look at Jeremiah 20 and identify the similarities of these prayers.*

The same language is used.

Remember Jeremiah at night was in stocks. The chief military religious policeman, the temple mafia, had put him in prison. When released, Jeremiah preached the same sermon, the same words that got him in prison. Then suddenly in chapter 20, the language changes. Outwardly, publicly, he says the same thing. However, in private, you have exact same language as Job 3 because there is an outward persona of Jeremiah. Then there is the inward persona. Inwardly he is hurting. Inwardly he is suffering adversity.

In Job 3 and Jeremiah 20, they are pouring out all this grief to God. Each is saying God has forgotten me, but they are both talking to God. This is an extraordinary thing. He says, you have forgotten who I am, but he is talking to God; he is praying.

Psalm 43:7 Deep calls to deep. People ask why bad things happen.

- *What are some? How did you and/or others grieve?*

We have heard liberal pastors say, "Well, bad things happen because god is not there. God turned his back. God's hands were tied." We have heard that. There is no shred of comfort in that. The thought that God is not there and his hands are tied is one scary thought. It's good to know that even though I may not know the reason why, God is there.

Psalmist said the waves are coming over me. Remember, the Hebrews did not like the sea much. They were not a sea-going people. They stayed home. They did not like the Sea of Galilee. Too many storms. The sea is a dark place, threatening place.

- *Go back to Job 1 and 2. How did the events come as waves upon waves over Job?*

- *But whose breakers are they? Who has set the limits on their size and effect?*

No matter how dark and how destructive, they are God's waves. How do we know? We have been loved in Jesus Christ.

How can I be assured that all is for my good? How does the cross assure me that this is for my good?

Because of the Cross. As theologians, how we keep providence from becoming tyrannical is the cross. God has committed himself to the cross and he can never abandon me because of the cross.

Is the psalmist healthy or unhealthy?

Yes, this psalmist is in the depths. He is experiencing the dark night of soul. Yes, he experiences melancholy. Yes, I suppose you could say psychologize a bit, which I hate. That he is depressed etc. But from another point of view, isn't this what the Christian life in this fallen world is like – sinners made saints in Jesus Christ and left to live out and share our life in Him - in a world bound under the curse of sin?

Read Acts 14:19-23

What do these verses foretell to those pastors who faithfully proclaim the Word of God and those to whom they preach it?

Through adversity and pain and setbacks and period of drought, we live our lives.

Recall the ground plan for building the New Testament church is given to us a Caesarea Philippi when Jesus asked the disciples about who the people and they thought He was.

“Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Matt 16:13-18 (ESV)

Part of what Jesus is saying is that he intends to build his church within enemy occupied territory. This reality is on display throughout the New Testament. In other words, we are in the sights of Mordor.

Recall the movie, The Lord of the Rings. At one point in the movie, Frodo and Sam looking are looking at gates of Mordor, and these horrible creatures come marching out and the entire structure and creatures are built and designed for death and destruction. That is where the church is built, right there. The smell of battle is wafting over us day after day.

Many may want to have a pastorate in Hawaii but the fact is this: for most of us it seems like Mordor.

3. From Our Lutheran Perspective

One evening, a recently retired LCMS pastor was discussing the ministry with his visiting son who was an active pastor in the Holy Ministry. In the course of their conversation, the father spoke heart-stricken about all the things he regretted in his ministry. As the conversation continued the son could tell that his father was truly troubled by them. Loving his father deeply and respecting him for the blessed pastor he was, the son offered his father the only comfort a pastor as for his people. He said to him, “Dad remember that the doctrine of justification is for pastors too.”

AC - IV. [JUSTIFICATION]

It is also taught among us that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God by our own merits, works, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith, when we believe that Christ suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness, as Paul says in Romans 3:21-26 and 4:5.

- Which pastor is exempt from this particular doctrine being true for them?
- Discuss the comfort a pastor is able to derive from hearing and believing in this simple and foundational truth in Jesus Christ?

Of course, none of them are, and there is no end to the comfort that can be derived for pastor and people. The only way the glorious truth of justification by grace through faith fails to comfort is if the pastor is looking to something else to justify and therefore comfort himself. (See Romans 4:24-5:2).

Read through each of the following and open the discussion up for the brothers to see themselves and their ministry in light of the theology of the Cross as Luther sets it forth in these excerpts.

Heidelberg disputation of 1518, Luther describes the essence of true theology as theology of the cross. The opposite of this is the theology of glory.

“That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as if it were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened. He deserves to be called theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross.” LW 31, 52. Theses 19 and 20 Heidelberg Disputation.

“He, however, who has emptied himself through suffering no longer does works but knows that God works and does all things in him. For this reason, whether God does works or not, it is all the same to him. He neither boasts if he does good works, nor is he disturbed if God does not do good works through him. He knows that it is sufficient if he suffers and is brought low by the cross in order to be annihilated all the more.” LW 31, 55

One of Luther’s favorite passages was Ps 4:3 and he says this: “Thus God exalts his saints, that the height of misfortune becomes the height of prosperity.” LW 14, 304

Luther describes the opposition between faith and experience especially by referring to the woes and troubles of this life and the great temptation to despair into which they plunge us. Our heart is afflicted by the present reality of severe trouble. The word of promise speaks of a redemption which lies in the future and is still hidden. Since we cannot see this hidden future, we cannot see the end of the present trouble either. We see only the beginning but not the end. Our vision is too weak and too nearsighted; it is unable to comprehend that hidden salvation which cannot be seen. God, however, sees the end of our trouble; and it is he who speaks the word of promise to us. For this reason we must give heed to what he says in his word rather than to our own nearsighted heart. WA 40, 59

“God says, ‘to me, your trouble is only a point, a moment, a drop, a spark.’ But reason converts a mathematical point into an infinite line, because it does not see the end of the affliction.” WA, 40, 63 “The Lord says, however, I have better vision than you do.” WA 40 60.

“To believe means to abandon the viewpoint of reason and of our own heart and take a chance on God’s word and on his perspective. Faith sees the reality of trouble as God sees it. Then the troubles and anxieties which seem so great and terrible to the natural eye become quite small, indeed nothing at all. What are they compared with God and the reality of his eternal grace in Christ? This is what the divine and heavenly mathematics teaches us.” WA 40, 64.

Points to Ponder

There is a wonderful lesson in Jer. 20. Inside he is hurting, but when it came to defend himself as prophet, he does so as a man of God, strong and relentless.

- How can we do the same? What resources or avenues are open to us?

The Bible informs us that we have a high priest who can be touched by our infirmities.

- Ever wonder what Jesus felt when Judas betrayed him? Yes he knew it would happen but ever ask what he felt? What did he feel like?
- When Peter let him down in the courtyard because of voice of a young girl?

Do you have someone with whom you can confess the feelings and faults that burden your heart and hear the sound of the Office of the Keys speaking divine declaration of forgiveness and freedom to you?

Where there is no humility before another, there can be no real peace from another. Confession and the Absolution settles the individual on foundation of their truth as a sinner and Christ's truth for them as the redeemed, which is greater.

4. For Conversation

On the cross, Jesus said, "My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt. 27:46). We know that he was forsaken in a way that we never ever will be forsaken. Never will we experience the full abandonment by God, because he bore that for us. As pastors, in midst of adversity, we press on because even as pastors, we are merely disciples, followers of the Good Shepherd who always goes before us.

So press on through trial, through adversity and when the furnace seems most hot, remember the One dwelt with three other pastors in a furnace that was heated seven times hotter than usual. In its midst with Him, they had no bonds and when the time was right, the world called them out so that they might rightly worship the living God (Daniel 3).

Read the end of the Psalm. He ends up in hope in God. He is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 3:13).

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Faithful & Afire

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2011-2012

The Under-Shepherd – Under the Cross

CONFESSION & ABSOLUTION – For the Under-shepherd under sin

Leader's Guide

I. Focus of this study

The focus of this study is on the Scriptural and Confessional texts which will catechize us on the gift, purpose and value of Private Confession & Absolution (P C&A). The practice of P C&A is not widely used in the LCMS today, if it has ever had a real foothold in the Church that our Lord intended for it when He instituted the Office of the Keys. We will discuss questions as to how this has happened, what obstacles get in the way of re-introducing the practice, and how we can bring this precious gift back for the sake of the Sheep and the Shepherd in the Church.

Of great importance will be the discussion of a Father Confessor for the clergy of the Church. We will see how Luther and Walther both expressed a dire concern over the life of P C&A in the Lutheran Church if it is not even exercised by the Clergy for their spiritual welfare. The return and proper practice of P C&A in the Lutheran Church begins with a proper understanding and practice of a Father Confessor for the Pastors of the flock.

The Office of the Holy Ministry is under attack by the Evil One and one of his tactics is to keep the Pastor away from one of the gifts God has given to the Office. Our inability to sever ourselves from the 19th century Pietism of Europe has left us with Reformed notions and considerations as to the success and failure of the Ministry. Deep depression, anger and misspent energy have a very negative toll on the Pastor when he is expected by the congregation to perform in a manner that is measurable by dollars and ever new memberships. In an ever-increasing number of congregations, especially where the laity are ignorant of the Treasures of Heaven given by the Lord of the Church to the Church, the value of a Pastor is more and more predicated on his people pleasing skills rather than his faithfulness to those Treasures.

With these new measures at hand, it is ever more important that the Christ given means of ordinary pastoral care for the sheep, and for the shepherd, be at hand and faithfully used in the LCMS. The focus of this study is to present the Biblical and confessional evidence that P C&A is that Christ given means of ordinary pastoral care for His sheep. We will also focus on the wonderful blessing

this is to the pastor himself. Our prayer is that P C&A would be re-introduced into the ordinary pastoral care of the sheep and practiced by the clergy with a Father Confessor.

II. Scripture Search

How do Psalm 29:11 and 85:10 speak of the relationship God has with PEACE?

How do John 14:27 and 20:19-23 help us to understand what is meant by the term "PEACE"?

From the Psalms texts one could make the mistake and think that "peace" is accomplished because God has exercised His mighty arm and taken all trouble away from the earth, or at least from those He declares are His. Yet the peace spoken of in John is not a peace that results from the absence of turmoil or danger. Peace comes in the divine reality that the "wages of sin" have been conquered by Him who has been able to suffer the consequences of sin yet rise from the dead in victory.

In the room where the disciples found themselves hiding for fear of the Jews, Jesus appears with the gift of "PEACE". Not the kind of peace that prescribes a life free from trouble and persecution, but a peace that is present especially in the midst of trouble and persecution. The apostles would be sent into the claws and fangs of evil with the gift of peace. Peace means "restoration" of a relationship that had previously been severed. In fact, it was a relationship so severed that there was no hope of reconciliation in even the best laid plans of man. The power to accomplish this desire was absent from human effort.

Peace was given in the absolution spoken by the Living Christ. Peace was in the holy absolution, not in a false promise of life as a rose garden. It was with that peace that the apostles would go bring peace to all who would believe in Jesus. The fear of death was overcome by the Word of the Living Lord; the wrath of God was appeased by the "Blood of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world".

Read Psalm 32:1-5 (historical context is II Samuel 12:1-17) and then read Psalm 51.

- What is the spiritual, emotional, mental and physical effect of unrepentant sin?
- Which sins are to be confessed by the confessor?

As David points out, his bones wasted away, he groaned all day long, and heaviness of his conscience sapped him of any strength. These are all characteristics of what is today called "depression".

The sins to be confessed are uniquely comprehensive in this Psalm (Psalm 32, NIV). Verses 1 and 2 use three different words for sin in the Hebrew language.

1. verse 1- "transgression" *pashah*. The basic meaning is to rebel, to knowingly act contrary to what is right and salutary i.e. deliberate disobedience.
2. verse 1- "sins" *chatah*. This means to miss the mark. The effort to do what is right and salutary is insufficient due to the fact no human effort is equal to the task of living up to God's holy requirements i.e. unintended sin.
3. verse 2- "sin or iniquity" *avon*. This means guilty or the quality of being unequal i.e. original sin makes man unequal to God and forever guilty before Him.

All sin is to be confessed before God, original sin, unintended sin and deliberate sin. When we are aware of them, we are to confess them. One need not confess all sins of which they are not aware for there are so many that we could not accomplish such a requirement.

What comfort does the promise in I John 1:5-9 offer?

In our dark and dirty lives of sin, God has come with His incomparable Light. Light shatters the darkness of our lives with purity and cleanliness. Our toxicity is purified, our failures are corrected, our faults are covered, our unrighteousness is replaced with Christ's righteousness, our death is taken into Jesus and His life is given to us.

With peace and comfort, absolution also brings strength. What is the strength spoken of in the following verses?

Isaiah 40:31, 41:10

Hope in the Lord is more than the crossing of one's fingers. It is a confidence that rests in an absolute reality. A reality that is not going to be fickle nor change, but one that is sure and certain with Divine Promise. The renewed strength is not based on our ability to pick ourselves up by our own boot straps. It is a strength that soars, walks and runs without getting weary for it is founded on Him who has survived all persecution and even death. It goes on without worrying what others say about us, because it is predicated on what we can say about Christ to others.

Luke 22:32

Jesus takes on the great enemy (Satan) and defeats him. He continues to fight the Evil One when he attacks us with accusations and condemnations of our sin. The defeat of Satan is the core of Holy Absolution. By this victory we are to bring strength to our brothers. This is ecclesiastically done with a Father Confessor.

Hebrews 12:4-13

Here the author of Hebrews talks about discipline from God. Discipline is not punishment for a wrong deed. It is a process by which God catechizes us in life and the need to trust our theology in the Ministry. Just because a member is angry with us is not evidence we have

failed at our ministry. It may very well be a mark that we are doing exactly what we are CALLED to do. Brother to brother admonition and counsel is also one of the good reasons to have a Father Confessor.

Holy Absolution bestows forgiveness, peace, comfort, strength and finally courage. What is the courage spoken of in the following verses?

John 21:15-19

Peter is confronted by Jesus with his denial after the Sanhedrin trial. Jesus absolves him with a threefold command. The first two times he asks Peter if he loves (*agape*) Him and each time Peter answers he does so with *Philos* love. Finally Jesus asks him a third time if he loved him but this time uses *Philos*. Jesus' point was made; Peter couldn't love Jesus with a divine, unconditional love that lives only in the divine of Jesus Christ – Son of Man and Son of God. But he does love Jesus with a brotherly love (*philos*) that recognizes the power of the love that Jesus has for him surpassing anything in creation. With this love of Christ for him and with him, he has the courage to go out, sinner that he was, and be a vessel through which the love (*agape*) of Christ would be preached in the Word of God. One could even say "in the holy absolution."

Acts 4:8-13

Peter courageously preaches in the midst of threat and enemy.

Acts 23:9-11

As the Pharisees echoed the holy absolution of God, "we find nothing wrong with this man." Paul preaches and carries on his ministry in the midst of a raging mob. That night the Lord tells Paul that his preaching in front of mobs and in positions of danger is not over. He will continue to do so in Rome. Paul was not deterred by fear but was able to go forth with "courage" based on the confidence in the ministry that God gave him. The ministry where we serve is no less the ministry that God gives us. Confer also Acts 27:21-26.

III. From our Lutheran Perspective

From the Book of Concord, the norm of our faith that has been normed, we find these references about confession and absolution. It is clear that the Lutheran Fathers had a concept of and a practice of Private Confession and Absolution. Read these references and ask yourselves if we reflect their thoughts and practice concerning P C&A today.

Augsburg Confession Article XI, XXV

Apology to the Augsburg Confession article XI, XXVIII (especially paragraph 5)

Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope (paragraph 26, 60-61)

Other suggested reading:

- *Smalcald Articles IV, VIII*
- *Luther's Small Catechism chief part V*
- *Luther's Large Catechism chief part V (a brief exhortation to confession)*

IV. Points to Ponder

What emphasis do these two quotes from our Lutheran Fathers place on the role of P C&A in the life of the church today?

"...in an evangelical way, through instruction and exhortation, and through praising it, (he should) work toward the goal that it (P C&A) be diligently used in addition to general confession and that, where it is possible and advisable, it be finally reintroduced as the exclusive custom and that it be properly preserved where it exists. But by all means he may under no circumstances yield to a congregation which does not want to permit the use of private confession and Absolution even on the part of the individual members..." (Walther's Pastoral Theology, pg. 120).

Walther intended for P C&A to be the ordinary care of a pastor for his flock, not something to be used in emergency cases only. It is to be as ordinary as the ordinary rubrics in the Divine Service.

"For it is the Christians' first, most necessary, and most useful school in which they learn to understand and practice God's Word and their faith, which they do not do so powerfully in public readings and sermons." (Luther as quoted in Walther's Pastoral Theology, pg. 121).

While Luther does not deny the power of the Gospel in the sermon or in the public reading of the Scriptures, he contends there is better learning of the Gospel and growth in the life of faith in P C&A.

Walther uses two more quotes from Luther in his Pastoral Theology. What is Luther cautioning us with these words?

"But whoever has a firm, strong faith in God and is certain that his sins have been forgiven him, he may well omit confession and confess to God alone. But how many are there who have such firm, strong faith and confidence in God? Let everyone look to himself that he does not mislead himself."

and

"If, as sadly! Often happens, the preacher himself does not make use of this glorious means of comfort and so cannot speak from experience about its glory, it is not amazing

if his teaching about this institution remains without results in his congregation." (Ibid. pg. 122).

To think that one does not need a Father Confessor is dangerously over estimating one's ability to avoid and contest the accusations and derision of the Devil. Luther claims that the pastor who does not make use of the Absolution ought not to be surprised their preaching and practice does not reflect the precious gift God has given to His Church.

With our doctrine of Church and Ministry (officially adopted by the LCMS in the convention of 1855) how do we address Walther's admonition to us in this quote?

"Every preacher should rather choose his own father confessor, confess to him regularly, and receive absolution from him. The preacher also needs this important means. How can he expect his listeners to respect the holy preaching office if he himself gives the appearance of despising it (by not having a pastor of his own)?" (Ibid. pg. 129).

While our polity on church and ministry is not familiar with the term "a pastor to pastors", the closest that we have to that, as Walther suggests, is a Father Confessor. The Father Confessor is not to be your District President since he also holds the office of "supervisor", nor should it be the circuit counselor. A Father Confessor is a fellow pastor in the holy ministry, maybe in a different circuit, who has years of experience and the ability to give sage counsel to the confession laid out before him. The confessional with a Father Confessor is "SEALED".

Why have we lost use of P C&A in the LCMS as the ordinary means of Pastoral Care?

Why has the use of a Father Confessor fallen by the wayside?

What are the consequences we experience in the Ministry because of these neglects?

In a sermon preached in 1872 on Matthew 9:1-8, Walther gives 5 reasons he thinks P C&A falls by the wayside. Read these and discuss whether you agree or disagree.

- 1. It is seen as either something too new or something that is a return to Romanism.**
- 2. Many no longer believe that the Christian Church has the power on earth to forgive sins. That such a spoken word through a human being is not efficacious.**
- 3. Sin is no longer seen as a shame before God.**
- 4. It has not been correctly taught or introduced into the parish.**
- 5. The pastor will know intimate details about the confessor and the parishioner will not be able to look at the pastor again.**

Are these legitimate reasons? If so, how shall you overcome them?

V. For Conversation

What is the difference between "general" confession and absolution; and "private" confession and absolution?

The difference is not the absolution. That is always the same. The difference is in the confession. More exact, detailed, and revealing of what troubles the soul.

What do you think about Luther's comment that the absolution in P C&A is more catechetical than the absolution in the sermon?

Is Luther speaking the value of a Father Confessor in this quote: (LW 42:161) "*Thus others bear my burden, and their strength is my strength. The faith of the church comes to the aid of my fearfulness; the chastity of others the temptation of my flesh; the fastings of others are my gain; the prayer of another pleads for me.*"

Is there a difference between "announcing" the forgiveness of sins and "bestowing" the forgiveness of sins? Use this analogy: If I announce to my brother that there is a sandwich in my lunchbox I only inform him of a truth. If however, I put the sandwich in his mouth I have given him that truth as a gift.

Discuss the following statement:

If the point of absolution is to do nothing else than communicate to him the intelligence that Christ has interceded for him in his sorry plight, and that God has restored him to favor, it has sold the sinner short. The sinner's problem was not ignorance but wrath. His load is not lack of information but unbelief, unbelief in the face of so much and such valid evidence that God is not pleased with him. Absolution does not inform a man about a change that has taken place once upon a time! Absolution changes the present relation to God by being the action in this time (in the voice of God) by the God whose act in Christ was once and for all time.

Soli Deo Gloria

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Faithful & Afire

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2011-2012
The Under-Shepherd – Under the Cross

Leader's Guide

The Shepherd's Heart

For the Lost, the Wandering, and the Wayward Sheep

February 2012

1. Focus of This Study

Our Lord's care and concern for people who had no faith relationship or a weakened relationship with God was a prominent part of His earthly ministry. Again and again, we see Him thinking about, praying for, speaking to, and acting on behalf of those who had separated themselves from God or were on the wrong path of life and were drifting away from Him.

Jesus used the shepherd imagery to describe His work, and He established the "pastoral" or "shepherd" office to carry on that work until He comes again as a shepherd to divide the sheep and the goats on Judgment Day (Matthew 25:31ff).

I once told my uncle, a dairy farmer, that I wanted to be a veterinarian. He looked at me and said, "You better think about that. Being a vet (especially for farm animals) is a dirty, stinking, nasty job. Are you sure?" The same could be said for the pastoral ministry. I have looked into the beaming faces of many young men heading to the seminary to prepare for the pastoral ministry. I am happy for them. It is a noble task as Paul says. But I have often thought, "How do I tell them what they are in for?" I do not want to discourage them. So, I usually commend and encourage them knowing two things: First, they will find out soon enough how rough the pastoral ministry can be. But, second, they will also find out how wonderful our Lord is in providing not only the greatest example of pastoral ministry, but also by providing the totally underserved grace, mercy and love for us as pastors which keeps us loving those who can be very hard to love.

For Discussion

Shepherding four-legged sheep is not an easy job. It was not a highly valued job among the Egyptians "for every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians." GN 46:34 NKJV. What are some of the difficulties that you as a pastor have encountered while trying to care for the lost, the wandering and the wayward sheep? What would you like to tell a seminarian if you could without scaring him off?

One of the most important reasons I like to attend circuit meetings is to hear the stories of the "veterans of the cross." Their experiences are extremely important, as we will see in point seven below. In one circuit, we also allowed a little time for "cases of casuistry." We need to share our experiences with one another to learn from one another.

2. Scriptural Study

Understanding God's Heart for the Lost

Read Luke 15:3-7

- This familiar passage truly shows us God's view of the lost. What is Jesus challenging us to give up in order to gain the lost?

The key word is "leave." The shepherd has to be willing to leave the ninety-nine in order to devote extra attention to those who are lost.

The shepherd has to have a love for that lost one.

- Why is this difficult?

It is difficult for two reasons. First, it is comfortable for pastors to spend time with those who are like-minded, supportive and encouraging. Second, those same like-minded, supportive and encouraging sheep often want and may even demand the pastor's constant attention.

- How can we overcome this difficulty?

Pastors have to remind themselves of God's will and desire to go after the lost, the wayward and wandering sheep. The pastor also has to be reminded that the people are God's sheep and they are in His keeping, not just the pastor's. They also have to teach their congregation how important this is.

Understanding the Lost, Wandering & Wayward Part One

Read Jeremiah 50:6; Ezekiel 34:4-12; Matthew 9:36

- These passages point out that an important factor in sheep getting lost has to do with those who have led them astray. In our society today, what people or things seem to contribute most to leading them astray?

This discussion would probably include such influences as parents, spiritually unhealthy pastors or churches, friends, college experiences, popular media stars, political movements, etc.

- It is so easy for pastors to develop negative attitudes toward the lost and wandering. When we look at that list of members who have not been to a worship service in months or years, we can become frustrated, even angry. Nevertheless, where should that frustration really be directed? Toward the sheep? Toward someone? Toward something? ???

The devil is the ultimate deceiver. He and those sold out to him have a powerful influence over people. People also have the residual of the old Adam rebelling within them 24/7. Pastors must always keep in mind who the real enemy is. Satan would be more than happy to see us becoming angry with the lost, the wandering and the wayward.

Understanding the Lost, Wandering & Wayward Part Two

Read Psalm 119:176; Isaiah 53:6; 1 Peter 2:25

- What do each of these passages teach us about the natural human condition? How can this help us in our attitude toward the lost and wandering sheep? How can our attitudes be shaped by false expectations?

God has clearly told us that the natural condition of all people is to move away from Him. It is a mistake for us to expect anything but that. Our own hearts feel the same pull (Note especially Psalm 119:176).

The Tools that Turn the Sheep

Read Psalm 51:13; Romans 10:17; Titus 3:5; John 20:22-23; Matthew 26:27-28

- As pastors, we are keenly aware of the importance of the Means of Grace as the essential gifts that God gives to turn the lost. How are we tempted to resort to other means? What is the difference between turning the sheep and attracting the sheep?

This discussion would challenge us to recognize the tension between “meeting felt needs” and giving people what our Lord truly says is needed.

- Should We (Pastors) Take the Time to Meet Face to Face with the Lost, Wandering & Wayward?
 - How did Jesus do this in His earthly ministry?

Jesus advocated the one to one ministry in the Parable of the Lost Sheep. He also showed by His example the importance of the ministry to individuals: The Canaanite Woman (Matthew 15:21ff); The Rich Young Ruler (Matthew 19:16ff); Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38ff); Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1ff); Nicodemus (John 3:1ff); The Woman at the Well (John 4:1); The Two Thieves on the Cross (Luke 23:32ff); The Restoration of Thomas (John 20:24ff); and the Restoration of Peter (John 21:15ff).

- What examples of ministry to individuals can you remember from the rest of the New Testament.

The Book of Acts also highlights examples of one to one ministry: Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26ff); Peter and Cornelius (10:1ff); Paul and Lydia (16:11), Paul and the Philippian Jailer (16:16); Paul and Agrippa (Acts 26:1ff). The personal greetings at the end of Romans, 1 Corinthians, Colossians, 2 Timothy, and Titus show Paul to be a pastor who related well with people on an individual level. The letter to Philemon also shows his pastor’s heart for an individual problem.

3. From Our Lutheran Perspective

Practical Approaches to the Lost, Wandering & Wayward

- *Go:* I knew a pastor who had a little sign posted on the dashboard of his car that read “Eighty percent of life is showing up.” What practical advice can you share that has helped you get going to reach these sheep?

This discussion might include ways of identifying who these sheep are (using a program like CPH’s Shepherd’s Staff or something similar). Creating call lists. Scheduling time in the week for these important calls. Finding appropriate times to visit. (I personally find Sunday afternoons to be an extremely good time.)

- *Get to Know:* Dr. Kristian C. Kincade recently wrote “Dr. Walther reminds us of the necessity of private pastoral care (Privatseelsorge). The faithful Pastor is to visit his flock, to call them by name, to “know their wool,” and to “let it be known that he bears in his heart a concern for every individual soul” (Walther, pg. 55). Visiting the flock in their homes, at the hospital, or care facility conveys pastoral concern and affords the opportunity to bring the comfort that God gives through His Word. Understanding the struggles, joys, fears, sorrows and trials the flock faces is aided by pastoral visitation. The Pastor moves among his flock because he cares for them. (*The Lutheran Clarion*, November 2011 Walther quote from *Pastoral Theology*, Lutheran News, 1995. Translated by John Drickamer from the Fifth Edition, 1906.)

Is it important for a pastor to know all his members by name? Do we exegete our hearers as carefully as we do the Scriptures? What practical tips do you have for this important aspect of pastoral ministry?

Discuss tools such as databases to keep track of members, email, social media, etc.

- *Guide:* We all know that building bridges is important. It is especially important to have some emotional capital with people if you are going to try to redirect them on their path of life. However, in the end, as stressed in point five above, it is the Means of Grace that turns the soul toward God. How have you been able to talk about the Word, Baptism and Holy Communion in order to bring about needed spiritual changes? What is especially different about the way we do this on an individual level compared to preaching and teaching to groups? What role does experience play in this facet of ministry?

I love to hear from other pastors, especially older pastors, stories of personal encounters they have had in the course of their ministry. I wish we had a resource of “verbatim” describing successful pastoral care experiences. (Maybe it would be just as helpful to hear about the unsuccessful experiences!)

When we are preaching and teaching publicly, we usually have a lot of control over what is being said. When we meet with individuals, we do not always know how they will respond. No matter how we think the conversation might go, we usually run into unexpected complications.

I firmly believe that the only way to succeed in this is first to put it into God’s hands, to pray and seek His guidance. Secondly, we have to try. I believe that God will bless our sincere efforts even though we might find ourselves stumbling once in a while - wishing we could remember certain Bible passages at the right time, etc. Thirdly, I know that we get better at it the more we try.

- *Give Them Time:* Jesus’ answer to Peter’s famous question, “How often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?” MT 18:21 NKJV, is a tremendous challenge to all Christians and particularly to pastors. I have rarely seen people change that much after just one visit from the pastor. I have also heard many people say, “I’m sorry, I’ll see you next Sunday...” You know where that often ends up. How much time should we give people? When should we draw the line? At what point must church discipline be exercised?

Jesus’ response to Peter must be taken seriously. I think we have to be very careful not to question a person’s repentance even though it may not appear to be genuine. Jesus’ answer (seventy times seven) implies that this could take a long time and that we should give it the time needed. In my experience, I have found that hypocritical people eventually get tired of saying “I’m sorry.” Sooner or later, they start giving me some attitude. I think that is the time for the pastor to begin what Jesus called for later in Matthew 18 (church discipline). The genius of following Jesus’ command and taking the necessary time and making the necessary sacrifices is that there is no way a person can be excommunicated and honestly say, “That church was unloving and judgmental.” With the groundwork of many encouraging efforts already laid, it is much more likely that this person will finally respond positively to our discipline.

4. Points to Ponder

In the Parable of the Wedding Feast (Luke 14:15ff), Jesus said the servants went to the highways and hedges to compel them ... this is a lot of work!!! Are We Up to the Task?

- Read the following passages, and share others, to draw out the blessed encouragement the Lord offers pastors for this difficult task: Psalm 51:12-13; 2 Chronicles 31:20-21; 2 Corinthians 1:4-6; Colossians 3:23-24; 1 Timothy 4:15-16; 1 Peter 1:13.

5. For Conversation

I once met an ecclesiastical artist who told me that the Good Shepherd has traditionally been portrayed in two ways. The Italian artists often stressed His divinity with a halo, clean robe, and a cheerful countenance as He carried the lost sheep on His shoulders. The German artists often portrayed His humanity with gaunt eyes, wearing a hat, and trudging along with a dirty sheep on His shoulders.

- If you were asked to use one of these two illustrations to depict what being an under-shepherd is really about, which portrayal would you choose?
- Is the life of an under-shepherd an either/or of these two portrayals, or is it a combination of both and all others in between?

Whichever way we prefer to think of the Good Shepherd, Jesus did assure us that He finally returned rejoicing with His neighbors over the lost sheep that was found. As we look to God's word for guidance, as we pray and seek His help, we can be confident that God will bless the important labor of trying to save the lost, wandering and wayward sheep.

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Faithful & Afire

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2011-2012 The Under-Shepherd – Under the Cross “Shepherding Through the Contradictions”

Leaders Guide

1. Focus of This Study

One does not serve as a pastor for very long without recognizing the contradictions. We serve and yet need to be served (we need our own pastor). We want to “fix” the many problems our people lay before us, yet the tools we have been given (Gospel and Sacraments) seem so inadequate to the task. Congregational pressures such as visitations or stewardship or evangelism or unrealistic expectations can all lead the pastor to seriously question his own vocation, and where he fits in the life parish. How many of us have been faced with some of these questions?

- “Pastor, we need more income. Can you either do a stewardship series or get more members so that our budget will balance?”
- “Why do you spend so much time at X when you should be spending your time and energy on Y?”
- “Our services aren’t exciting enough. Can you make them more interesting with variety, but still keep it traditional?”
- “Is the Word I preach even effective? Is anybody listening?”

Notice that these questions are ones that should be fairly common to most pastors in many different settings. While the worship one may be easily distracting (worship wars), I would suggest trying to steer the conversation away from topics that are going to polarize at this point. Encourage the group to find common questions that seem contradictory or without any real answers. DO NOT FRET ABOUT TRYING TO SOLVE THEM!

These and many other questions plague the life of the pastor every day. St. Paul exhorts us to preach the Word “in season and out of season,” (2 Timothy 4:2), to reprove with gentleness (Galatians 6:1), and yet to correct publicly when necessary (Galatians 2:11-15).

In the midst of our own vocational contradictions (or perhaps paradoxes), our flock has their own conundrum’s of faith and life. Luther’s *simul justus et peccator* certainly holds true when it comes to the contradictions of everyday life. Some of the many seeming contradictions our parishioners face every day might include:

- How do I provide for my family while spending time with them?
- Why does the church always talk about trusting in God and yet disaster seems like it is constantly happening?
- Why should I spend my precious time and energy doing things like prayer or going to church when there is not any real evidence that it does any good?

- How can God speak to me in words of Law at one moment and words of Gospel in the next? Why can't He make up His mind?

The point of this section is to engage the study group in how our lives as pastors are contradictory, that we face many irreconcilable differences between God's Law and God's grace, expectations and reality, and that we walk by faith, not sight. By spending some time discussing these questions, the leader should avoid trying to come up with simple solutions to each problem. Rather, the leader should guide the discussion toward how these contradictions are a regular part of parish ministry. It should also be noted that the challenges the pastor faces are not always that different from what his own flock might face every day.

2. Scripture Search

Believing the Unbelievable - Read 2 Kings 5:1-19

Naaman, an unbeliever, is faced with the terrible disease of leprosy. One can only imagine how this might incapacitate him as the commander of the army of Syria. His desperation leads him to trust the word of an Israelite slave. However, when the moment of truth comes for him to go into the water of the Jordan seven times, he cannot do it. The contradictions are too great. What he *sees* and what he *hears* are too far apart.

- What are the contradictions that Naaman faced in this episode?
- What are the contradictions that the King of Israel faced?
- What are the contradictions that Elisha faced?
- In what way might Elisha have been tempted to fix things by his own power, rather than by the Word of God?
- What is it that convinces Naaman to trust the word of the prophet and go into the Jordan River seven times?

This is a perfect text for discussing what we see verses what we hear. Naaman faces contradictions on every corner. He is a commander, and yet he is shunned as a leper. He sees no evidence that Elisha can heal, but he seems to have no other options. In the same way, the King of Israel is put in the position of being asked to do the impossible for him. His vocation as king did not include healing. Therefore, he is in a no-win scenario. Elisha's contradictions are harder to see. He certainly would have been tempted to not help the Syrian general. It is not as if Syria and Israel were always allies. For Elisha, "fixing" things might have meant simply letting Naaman die. Naaman is finally brought to the river Jordan not by the persuasion of Elisha, but by his own slaves. Sometimes the seed planting that we do as pastors needs the encouragement, prayers, and exhortations of others. It is God's Word, not ours. We do not have to try and control it.

Read John 20:19-31

Here we have the familiar territory of "doubting Thomas". Let us examine this episode from a pastoral perspective. Our Lord appears to the ten disciples after His resurrection from the dead. He institutes the Office of the Ministry ("receive the Holy Spirit..."). But Thomas is not there. He does not hear the word and promise of our Lord with his own ears. He only hears it from the mouths of his fellow disciples, now apostles. Our Lord actually has to appear to Thomas and show him the wounds before Thomas will believe.

- What is the contradiction Thomas faces?
- How might this episode have been a source of frustration for the other disciples/apostles?
- What does Jesus do for Thomas at the second appearance?

- How does this story from Jesus' life point us to the role that we pastors are to play in the lives of our people?
- Where do these verses fit into your own self-understanding as proclaimer of God's Word?
"Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:30–31 ESV)

It is always easy in familiar territory to gloss over the details. What we have here is Thomas being absent from the visible witness of Jesus. This is perhaps the first opportunity that the other apostles had to testify that Jesus rose from the dead. Thomas' response is hardly encouraging. It is easy to imagine how they would be frustrated. "Why doesn't he just believe us!" Jesus actually had to appear before Thomas and show him the wounds before he would believe. For us pastors, we have the words from John 20:31 to give us comfort and hope. It is the Word that creates faith, not us. Even in the midst of contradictions.

Living with the Unlivable - Read Romans 7:7-25

The ultimate contradiction! Saint and sinner. Paul here gives us a picture of the struggle every pastor faces. Indeed, this is the struggle of every Christian! How is it that I can know what the right thing to do is, look it in the face, and then do the exact opposite?

- Why is this basic contradiction/paradox of the Christian life such a source of frustration, as a Christian and as a pastor?
- Do our people believe that knowledge of the Law will persuade or convince them to do what is right? Why?
- Where does the ability to carry out the Law (v. 18) come from?
- How might Paul's description of our life as one of war (vv. 22-23) serve to help us understand the plight that our own parishioners face every day? How might this affect our message and ministry to them?
- Where is the victory, if it is not in our behavior?

As pastors, we are constantly tempted to try to fix people's problems. We want to serve as spiritual handymen, doling out advice and making things better with our great wisdom. However, people are sinners, as are we. So we may look exactly at a person, know precisely what they should do (or not do), tell them, but they still will not do it! Furthermore, we will do the same thing ourselves!

Yet even though we know this theologically, we are constantly tempted pastorally to believe that the Law will produce good works and change in people. Our ability to keep the Law can never lie in ourselves. It is only through Jesus Christ that the Law is kept. However, that warfare is very real. This can actually serve as a source of comfort for the Christian. The fact there is a war on and that I am struggling is a sign that I am in fact in the battle! Moreover, that battle has already been won in Jesus' death and resurrection. No matter how bad things may seem in the muck and mud of life, the absolute worst that can happen is I die and go to heaven. Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord, Jesus Christ!

3. From Our Lutheran Perspective

There may be particular areas of concern that apply in your area. Make a point of bringing them up for discussion here. It is important that as pastors we recognize that the challenges we face are often nearly the same, even if the ministry settings might vary widely.

The Paradox of Authority

A large part of the seeming contradictions in the pastoral ministry really center around what we are called to be and to do. Melancthon writes in the Augsburg Confession:

⁵ Our teachers' position is this: the authority of the Keys [Matthew 16:19], or the authority of the bishops—according to the Gospel—is a power or commandment of God, to preach the Gospel, to forgive and retain sins, and to administer Sacraments. ⁶ Christ sends out His apostles with this command, “As the Father has sent Me, even so I am sending you ... Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld” (John 20:21–22). ⁷ And in Mark 16:15, Christ says, “Go ... proclaim the Gospel to the whole creation.”

⁸ This authority is exercised only by teaching or preaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments, either to many or to individuals, according to their calling. In this way are given not only bodily, but also eternal things: eternal righteousness, the Holy Spirit, and eternal life. ⁹ These things cannot reach us except by the ministry of the Word and the Sacraments, as Paul says, “The Gospel ... is the power of God for salvation to everyone that believes” (Romans 1:16). ¹⁰ Therefore, the Church has the authority to grant eternal things and exercises this authority only by the ministry of the Word. So it does not interfere with civil government anymore than the art of singing interferes with civil government. ¹¹ For civil government deals with other things than the Gospel does. Civil rulers do not defend minds, but bodies and bodily things against obvious injuries. They restrain people with the sword and physical punishment in order to preserve civil justice and peace [Romans 13:1–7].¹

- In light of this, what are the tools at the pastor's disposal to bring to bear on the situations he and his flock face every day?
- What other tools are we tempted to use along the way?

These words from the Augsburg confession serve as a constant reminder and guard to the pastor. All we have is the Gospel and Sacraments. All we can do is preach and teach and administer what God has given us to administer. Any time we delve into other areas, we are on very shaky ground.

Some of the “tempting tools” might include seeing ourselves as the executor of the congregation's will (employee), as a psychological problem-solver, as a spiritual cheerleader (encouraging others into good works), or as a motivator-vision maker. While all of these may be related to the pastoral office in some way or another, none of them are the pure preaching of the Word and administration of the Sacraments that the Augsburg Confession alludes to.

One of the great treasures of the Christian Church is St. Augustine's homilies on the Holy Ministry.² In one of these sermons he writes,

Unless the Lord helps us carry our burdens, we shall sink beneath them, and unless he carries us, we shall fall to our death. My position at your head frightens me, but the condition I share with you consoles me. I am a bishop set over you, but a Christian in company with you. The first is the name of the office I have undertaken, the second of grace; the first of danger, the second of salvation. So it is as if we are tossed about by a storm in the raging sea of that office, but as we remember who has redeemed us by his blood, it is as if we enter the safety of a harbor

¹ *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*. 2005 (Edited by Paul Timothy McCain) (58). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

² “We Are Your Servants”: Augustine's Homilies on Ministry. Translated by Audrey Fellowes. Villanova: Augustinian Press, 1986.

in the stillness of that thought. Though this office is hard work for us personally, the common benefit provides us with rest.³

- Should the pastor be afraid in the face of the contradictions and irreconcilable challenges of the office?
- Where does our comfort, then, lie?
- How does St. Augustine see the paradox of being a pastor and a parishioner at the same time?
- Does the pastor himself need a pastor? Where does one go for pastoral care?

Pastors need not be afraid of being weak or in need. A part of our role as pastors is to serve as an example to the flock, and a part of that example may be showing the congregation how to receive help from others. The office of the ministry is a cross and a burden. We do no favors to our congregation by pretending anything else. However, we receive the same benefits that everyone else receives by that office.

This is also why it is of great benefit for pastors to have their own pastor. Hearing the message of salvation from your own preaching is good, but hearing it from someone else is better.

In his book, *Pastoral Care Under the Cross: God in the Midst of Suffering*, Richard Eyer recounts the story of one of his first calls to a deathbed as a young pastor.⁴ He paints the picture of a young pastor who is called to the bedside of a member of a neighboring parish. They cannot reach their own pastor for whatever reason. He goes, sits at the bedside, and watches the man die. He felt helpless and overwhelmed by the event, and useless as a pastor. After the “gentle death” occurred, the man’s own pastor came in, had a brief devotion with the family, and left. He then writes,

My own helplessness in the face of death seemed a problem to me at the time, but feeling helpless never feels good. In this case, however, to take charge and do something is an attempt to erase or cover up the pain of this death seemed a worse thing. To take charge is to succumb to the temptation to espouse the theology of glory, whereas a willingness to feel helpless in the face of suffering may be called being faithful. It is, after all, in faithfulness to the suffering Christ of the cross that we are called to be pastors. Glory will have to wait for the Second Coming (pp. 36-37).

- How do we as pastors balance the desire and need to bring the Word of God to bear on a situation with our own desire to fix the unfixable?
- What are the expectations of the mourners in a situation like this? How might those expectations be contradictory?
- What is the theology of glory, and how are we as pastors tempted to succumb to it?

A discussion of the theology of glory vs. the theology of the cross is a big topic, but one that is certainly worth at least bringing up. This is inherent in our own understanding of how we try to play God with people’s problems. Furthermore, it is very helpful for the pastor to be mindful of his own expectations in a visit, and the expectations of those he is visiting.

4. Points to Ponder

Perhaps the greatest contradiction of all is that we are all dying. Sickness and disease, even death itself can create a trial of faith that is born out of our fundamental belief that “I’m a Christian. These things

³ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁴ Richard C. Eyer, *Pastoral Care Under the Cross: God in the Midst of Suffering* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1994), pp. 34-37.

shouldn't be happening to me." Our lives are messed up, sometimes nearly beyond all recognition. This is made even worse, when the brokenness and sinfulness of the pastor himself causes situations in parish life to get worse, not better.

- How do we as pastors address the ongoing struggle of sin and forgiveness, which we talked about in Romans 7 in those we shepherd? ... in ourselves as sheep and shepherd?

It might be worthwhile here to talk about pride and how it always displaces us from those places and responsibilities the Lord has given us. How pride leads us as pastors to put ourselves above our people as if we have all the answers. This also points to the great need we have of receiving pastoral care from someone else.

Another key element in the contradictions is the role of repentance. We read in the Augsburg Confession:

¹ Our churches teach that there is forgiveness of sins for those who have fallen after Baptism whenever they are converted. ² The Church ought to impart Absolution to those who return to repentance [Jeremiah 3:12]. ³ Now, strictly speaking, repentance consists of two parts. ⁴ One part is contrition, that is, terrors striking the conscience through the knowledge of sin. ⁵ The other part is faith, which is born of the Gospel [Romans 10:17] or the Absolution and believes that for Christ's sake, sins are forgiven. It comforts the conscience and delivers it from terror. ⁶⁵

- What role does repentance play in your own ministry?
- Have you ever had occasion to repent and ask forgiveness of your congregation?
- How might you as pastor model repentance for your parish?
- What does repentance have to do with faith and the apparent contradictions we all face?

While we, as pastors are to lead lives that are above reproach (1 Timothy 3:2), that does not mean we are without sin. By teaching the congregation that we are sinners, and modeling confession and forgiveness for them, we can do great service to them in understanding their own lives in Christ in the midst of the difficulties of life.

5. For Conversation

- How do I as a pastor avoid the trap of trying to fix the unfixable in others? ...in himself?
- What is the parishioner's expectation when they come to see me?

One of the wisest bits of counsel I ever received from another pastor was the simple suggestion to ask people what you can do for them when they come to see you in pastoral care ("counseling") situations. By doing this, you can clarify what their expectations are, and it gives you opportunity to hold up for them Jesus and the Gospel.

- How might I as the pastor help my parishioners to expect to hear the Gospel from me, and not simply solutions to their earthly problems?
- What role does referral play in the expectations of my members?

All of these questions are designed to lead the conversation toward the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins, and in helping the pastor to see his role as sin-forgiver and life-giver, not as problem-fixer.

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⁵ *Concordia : The Lutheran Confessions*. 2005 (Edited by Paul Timothy McCain) (38). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

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Faithful & Afire

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2011-2012

The Under-Shepherd – Under the Cross

Leader's Guide

The Shepherd's Purpose: Feeding or Fleecing the Sheep?

April 2012

1. Focus of This Study

The saloon keeper said, “Sir, are you a pastor?” I said, “Yes.” He said, “Come in and eat with us.” ... We sat down. “Pastor, please pray.” I prayed and had a hearty meal. He said, “Do you know Professor Walther?” I said, “Yes, very well.” He said, “I was in St. Louis with a sugar baker. I forgot his name, a well-known man. Walther tried to convert me but he couldn't.” I said, “Too bad; if you want to go to heaven, you must be converted.” He said, “Pastor, if the time comes, there will be a way. I am not a blasphemer.” I said, “Can I not preach here?” He said, “You see, formerly one came and said he was a pastor, held a service, and told the people travel costs money. They should raise a collection for him. They did. He went to the next saloon and spent it for drinks. Others did the same. We lost confidence.”

Lebenslauf, pg 48, manuscript of the life of Pastor Johannes Jacob Streiter.

“Wolves in sheep's clothing” are often associated with those who teach false doctrine. Unfortunately, these are not the only ones who can devour the flock. Taking advantage of parishioners for personal gain is a temptation pastors have faced for a long time. Their sin often scandalizes in such a way that the sheep lose faith, as the above story from our early LCMS history illustrates.

The point of the illustration is the consequences which unethical pastoral behavior creates: a lack of confidence in the Gospel and its messengers who represent Christ. The proclaimer and the proclamation are so bound up with each other that to lose confidence in one is to lose confidence in the other.

While these sins are often sex or money related, they are not exclusively so. What other temptations can lead a pastor to take advantage of his congregation, either collectively or individually, for his own personal gain?

Many of these find their root in a desire for power or status. Although still inexcusable, some temptations do arise from being poorly paid or from pressures applied by family members whose trust level in God's providential grace may not match that of the pastor.

2. Scripture Search

How do the following passages speak to the temptation of “fleecing,” rather than feeding the flock?

The chosen passages present both negative and positive aspects of the issue.

- a. “Thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts.” Ezekiel 34:1-5

Kings, prophets, and priests were all designated “shepherds.” The Hebrew verb forms emphasize a continual action. The indictment is that the shepherds only act for their own enjoyment and pleasure. That the sheep had become food for all the wild beasts signifies what happened to them under their Gentile oppressors like the Syrians, Assyrians, Ammon, and Moab.

- b. “And I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding.” Jeremiah 3:15

The day will come when God will replace the bad shepherds with true shepherds, pointing to the New Testament where the Spirit gifts the church with pastors and teachers. Note that what characterizes these promised shepherds is how God characterized David – “a man after my own heart.” God's heart is love, demonstrated by the cross. Pastors are called to exhibit that same love for the flock. The food they offer consists of preaching the liberating Gospel truth from God's word.

- c. “He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.” John 10:12-13

The consequences which the self-interested hireling leaves in his wake are disastrous – sheep scattered by the wolves. As the wild beasts mentioned in Ezekiel are the ungodly, so are the wolves here. Pastors who are motivated by self-interest have little “ownership” of the flock and so are ready to use them for their own advancement or interest.

- d. “For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed— God is witness. Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ.” 1 Thessalonians 2:5-6

In both this and the following section, St. Paul must defend his ministry because of the circumstances in which he left Thessalonica. He was whisked away in the dark, which must have caused a lot of talk about his true intentions. Reading between the lines, Paul fears that some think he was nothing more than any other itinerant peddler of philosophy. Paul's words set forth in negative description, characteristics that are fitting for Gospel proclaimers – honest, moderate, humble.

- e. “So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us. For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.” 1 Thessalonians 2:8-9

In today's language, Paul demonstrates that he had “skin in the game.” His narrative demonstrates how he was a man after God's own heart. He was “affectionately desirous,” ready to “share our own selves,” and so set forth an incarnational ministry on Christ's behalf. It was no nine-to-five job for the apostle! Perhaps to distance himself from the

itinerant teachers and philosophers, Paul reminds them that he was no financial burden to them.

- f. "... I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength." Philippians 4:11b-13

While verse 13 often is (mis)applied to various situations, here's one to which it really does refer: reliance on the Lord for strength to live in one's current financial situation. The more one can rely upon the Lord, the less he has to battle against the temptation to misuse others for his own gain.

3. From Our Lutheran Perspective

"Therefore dear brothers, for God's sake I beg all of you who are pastors and preachers to devote yourselves sincerely to the duties of your office, that you feel compassion for the people entrusted to your care ... Christ Himself will be our reward if we labor faithfully. The Father of all grace helps us to do just that. To Him be praise and thanks forever through Christ our Lord. Amen." - Martin Luther, *Preface to the Small Catechism*

The Small Catechism was written, in part, as a result of Luther's participation in the Saxon Visitation of 1528. Although he found many pastors to be incompetent and unskilled, here he encourages them in a positive way to fulfill the duties of their office. They remain powerful words for us when we find ourselves looking upon our work as just another way to put bread on the table. Christ will be our reward, too, if we labor in faith!

"Even if we assume that many of the members know what the rights and duties of a pastor are, a pastor still has an extraordinary opportunity of gaining the support of a large segment of the congregation, a majority that will back him through thick and thin. And then, when a dishonest pastor wants to promote his own ideas, there is a whole regiment that will support him, and the honest people won't be able to do a thing about it. Such a person usually cozies up to the leaders and the rich members who are very influential and from whom the less influential ones have borrowed money. Then, when the "big wheel," who has lent money to many of the poorer people, speaks up in the voters' assembly and says, 'It is just as Pastor says, and I won't stand for any criticism of him,' the less wealthy will think, 'He might very well call in his loan,' and so they will say nothing." - C. F. W. Walther, "Duties of an Evangelical Synod," *Essays for the Church, Vol II* (St Louis: CPH, 1992), p 36.

In this essay, delivered at the first Iowa District convention, Walther steers a straight course between clergy or congregational domineering. He argues that belonging to a Synod provides certain benefits to congregations that may be served by self-serving pastors.

"The servant shepherd enters the ministry not because he seeks the power inherent in a leadership position, but because he can serve by leading and lead by serving. The servant shepherd examines, evaluates, and develops his ministry according to the servant shepherd criterion and not merely on the basis of job descriptions, performance reviews, and statistical criterion of success. The Good Shepherd develops within them servant shepherd and his flock the servant attitude of John the Baptist who said that Jesus "must become greater; I must become less" (John 3:30).

The pastor will know that he may no longer be modeling the servant shepherd role when:

- His people attach themselves to his person and personality and not to Christ – and he enjoys this.
- He finds himself trying to live up to the expectations of any criteria or person other than Jesus Christ.
- He begins to direct the congregation's affairs on the basis of manipulation, persuasion, personality, legalism, or power maneuvers.
- The weaker members of the congregation – those who are poor, the children, and the feeble - no longer appear to be comfortable in his presence or seek him out, and he prefers it that way.”

Commitments of The Shepherd: Principles of Conduct for Ordained Ministers of the Gospel (A Statement adopted by the Council of Presidents – The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, September 1990), pgs 8-9.

4. Points to Ponder

Undershepherds have been called by God to feed those entrusted to his care with the Gospel.

When pastors feed with anything beside God's Word, sheep ought to become suspicious. Unfortunately, flattery does open doors for those who know how to use it!

Pastors can be tempted to use others for their own purposes no less than anyone else.

The challenge of the ministry is to balance the call to leadership with the call to servanthood. “Lording it over another” in the manner of the Gentiles is not just a way to satisfy a desire for power, it is also a way to manipulate others to fulfill the pastor's personal agenda, or so he can be treated in a manner he thinks is due him.

Christ warns those who mistreat their flock and forgives those who repent of these sins.

While some pastors are quick to remind the flock that they represent the Lord, they may not so easily remember that for that very reason they are judged strictly. The Gospel offers and gives forgiveness to pastors who they see their broken condition.

The Holy Spirit gives the pastor a new heart with which to serve God's people unselfishly.

Christ's gift of a renewed nature in baptism is the only place pastors can go for strength to show forth a sacrificial nature patterned after Christ's love for the sheep.

Christ can strengthen pastors to live in abundance or scarcity without abusing the flock entrusted to their care.

In every instance where my faith in God's merciful and providential care with regard to first article needs has wavered, it has been bolstered by the way in which prayers were answered. In some cases, even before they were vocalized. In times of scarcity, God has provided wonderful personal growth through a testing that brought another level of spiritual maturity.

5. For Conversation

- a. Pastor Smith has been asked to perform a wedding which, due to attending circumstances, he does not feel comfortable doing. On the other hand, his family has incurred an unexpected expense because their washing machine just died. The wedding honorarium would relieve the financial crunch. In what ways could he safeguard himself to avoid the temptation?

Pastor Smith could establish as a policy in which he accepts no honorarium for performing weddings, freeing him from financial temptation and enabling him to decide whether to participate on the merits of each circumstance. He could be guided by a congregational policy that would help him say “no” without the temptation to use perspective couples for personal financial gain.

- b. Pastor Jackson would like to be the shepherd of a nearby prestigious congregation in his District. On several occasions when he has discovered that certain members of that church have died, he has sent sympathy cards to the family, offering them his condolences. He has also stopped by to visit their members when he hears they are in the regional hospital. When the congregation's pastor took another call, these families spoke glowingly about how Pastor Jackson had been so thoughtful in their time of illness or grief, and ask that his name be put on their call list. What harm, if any, has been done?

Pastor Jackson has turned sheep into opportunities to advance his personal career. In doing so, he also devalues the current call where God has placed him to serve. By inserting himself into the situation as he has, he will make that call less certain should he receive and accept it to that congregation. If things go bad for him there, it will seem as though he engineered the call himself and will have little, if no divine assurance.

- c. Rob and Mary received an invitation to come over to their pastor's home for an evening. The pastor has told them he has something he'd like to share with them. When they arrive, they find several other couples present as well. After some small talk, the pastor begins to explain why he's called them to his home. He and his wife would like to introduce them to a line of home products and tell them how they can earn extra money by becoming distributors of these products. Has an ethical boundary been crossed? If so, how? If not, why not?

Several boundaries have been crossed.

First, the pastor was not transparent about why he invited the couples to his home.

Second, he will in effect turn those who agree to be distributors into his employees because he will profit from every product they sell.

Third, because of the pastor – parishioner relationship, some may find it hard to say “no” to the offer lest they offend their pastor and this will change their relationship.

- d. Pastor Williams is bi-vocational. He works 21 hours/week in the men's department of a large retailer. One Sunday after church he tells his parishioners that the store is having a competition to see which sales associate can get the most credit card applications. He tells the members that they could help him win 1st prize by filling out a credit card application. Has an ethical boundary been crossed? If so, how? If not, why not?

Parishioners who feel guilty because they are unable to pay their pastor full-time compensation may want to help him out by completing an application. Others, fearing that he may hold something against them if they don't, may be moved to comply as well. In both cases the pastor's stature and authority are misused or at least misunderstood.

- e. Over a period of three years, several families have heard other church families casually remark that they've been invited to the pastor's lake cottage for supper on various occasions. These same families have been appointed to leadership positions in the church over the past year. They are always supportive of the pastor even when he does things that others find questionable. When others have asked the pastor about these things, he has responded by saying, “If you aren't satisfied here, perhaps you need to find a different church home.” Recently he has excommunicated one of the families that questioned his actions rather than

obey him. One of the leadership families has admonished one of the questioning families by quoting Scripture, "Touch not the Lord's anointed." This family has since called you, their circuit counselor for help. Where do you begin?

Obedience to the overseer is always in connection with the Word of God, not in connection with one's personal agenda. The counselor begins where matters such as this always must begin, encouraging both sides to speak to each other with the hope of bringing repentance where it is needed. If it appears that the pastor has stepped out of line and is commanding things beyond the scope of Scripture and his office, he is urged to repent and turn to Christ for forgiveness. The circuit counselor stands ready to bring a word of absolution where repentance has taken place.

In your concluding prayers, ask God to bless all pastors with genuine concern for the lost and straying as well as for those under their spiritual care. Also ask God to guard them from material temptations as well as those of status, power, and greed. Finally, ask God to give pastors the courage to repent of any sins related to abusing the flock and to find comfort in Christ's forgiveness and power.

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Faithful & Afire

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2011-2012
The Under-Shepherd – Under the Cross

Leader's Guide

The Pastor As Undershepherd - *According to Ease or Call*

Prayer: Lord God, heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of the priesthood of all believers as well as the gift of the Office of the Holy Ministry. Help us to see that you have welded these two gifts together in love even as You have, through Your Son, set apart some to be called pastors to equip the sheep of your pasture through the gospel. May the great love of Your Son move us pastors ever to say “Thy will be done” as we run the race to feed Your sheep with Your Word, in Your Way, with Your love. Help us to be at ease with awkwardness in those moments of ministry when we are acutely aware we are a major work in progress. By Your Spirit help us not to shrink from proclaiming the full counsel of Your strong Word and to love Your sheep fervently. May Christ’s blueprint for the call be the imprint upon our ministry. Bless all the brothers here today and help us ever to pray for one another and wholesomely support one another, that we will grow together in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. Focus of This Study

Is the Office of the Holy Ministry to be carried out according to the pastor’s ease, according to members he seeks to appease, or according to a desire to please the Lord of the call? (2 Corinthians 5:9)

Blessedly, the Good Shepherd gives us insight, grace, and mercy for the rugged nature of the call. He invites struggling pastors under the burden of the law to come to Him for *rest*. (Matthew 11:28) He offers a yoke that is the end of the law. (Romans 10:4)

Every graduate of our seminaries no doubt was forewarned of the hardships embedded in pastoral ministry. Expect toil and moil. (2 Corinthians 11:27, *kopoi kai mochthoi*) Expect dread, drudgery, despair and difficulty. (2 Corinthians 1:8-9) Expect cross-like cousins of the perils of Paul. (2 Corinthians 11:23-29) The cruciform life we learned not only came to the disciple via baptism but we realize it comes in spades through the fiery baptism lit by service in the Office of the Holy Ministry.

A respected churchman of our LCMS believes more and more pastors are redefining the call as revealed in Scripture by the Chief Shepherd, the Lord Jesus. He writes, “I have heard too many pastors justify their neglect of those areas of ministry they don’t enjoy with the words, ‘That’s not my thing, my strength, my joy, my passion’.”

Shifting from the call to serve according to Christ’s gift to our individual gifts/passions is frighteningly subtle but seismic.

- Do we view the call according to our own thinking rather than according to what Jesus designs, desires and does through us?

- How do we not fall into the trap of a Burger King call—*have it your way*?

A half century ago a pastor was called to teach, preach, administer the sacraments, make means of grace visits, study the Bible and pray. Today, in many ecclesiastical circles that list of fundamental tasks has mushroomed to more than twenty-five. Thus, there may be unrealistic expectations.

- How can pastors avoid taking on more than what our loving Lord bids?
- How can we avoid slippage into ministry crafted by people, programs, and worldly pressures from the world?

A sizeable number of pastors retire early, quietly quit, or are removed. Available research indicates that the pastoral survival rates in all denominations are abysmal.

“There is little praise and much criticism in the church today, and who can live for long in such a climate without slipping into some type of depression,” so wrote Henri Nouwen. Chuck Wickman, in his book *Pastors At Risk* (2011), states that 70 percent of pastors constantly fight depression. He also notes that 50 percent of the pastors are so discouraged they would leave the ministry if they could, but they have no other way to make a living.

2. Scripture Search

ELIJAH WALL BANGER

It is sobering when a major prophetic shepherd of God’s flock, Elijah, burns out. The towering Tishbite teacher hits a wall. He had hoped for a glorious Reformation after whipping the Baal prophets. Instead, God gave him a cross – Jezebel. Before this, he had fallen into an ace clergy killer: **Isolation**. Isolated, he cannot think straight.

Review 1 Kings 19. The Lord (Jesus) comes to Elijah as the Angel of the Lord. What five things does Jesus lovingly do to re-inflate this deflated prophet?

To ease his burden, Jesus gives Elijah (1) physical rest and (2) healthy food. Again, he gives him more rest and nourishment. Then Jesus puts Elijah on a (3) forty-day walking program. (4) Then Jesus comes to Elijah in the gentle but powerful whisper of His Word. (5) Finally, he takes this lone wolf and puts him back into the fellowship of His sheep. Lone wolves and lone ranger Christians are out of step with the “we-ness” of God’s Israel.

- What can we do to help brother pastors avoid isolation or suffer skewed thinking?
- How can we be part of the crucial “iron sharpens iron” (Proverbs 27:17) for mutual edification?
- How did St. Paul keep himself from being isolated? As he is facing death, note Paul’s two-fold hunger. (2 Timothy 4:9-13)³

He is hungry for fellowship with the brothers and hungry for God’s Word—the parchments! He will devour God’s Word and Christ so that the roaring lion will not devour him.

CULLING CAREFULLY FROM CHRIST’S CALL

An LCMS clergyman in two small parishes has the following holy habit. After reading 2 Timothy 2:1-10 more than 800 times over the past 15 years, do you think he views ministry as a walk through the park or as a challenging cross-country marathon? Do you think his continuous reading of these five epistles has helped to center him upon the boundless love of Christ and the boundaries of Christ for His/his office?

As long as we think the call is at our discretion and according to our ease, God is reduced to an “insignificant cipher.” (Gerhard Forde) The idea of the call being according to our ease is erased by Paul’s three-fold choice of metaphors for ministry. The pastor is to be willing to suffer hardships as a good soldier, endure pain as a highly trained athlete, and toil to the point of

exhaustion as a hard-working farmer. Paradoxically, the Pastoral Epistles make the pastor's call less burdensome by keeping his focus on the grace Jesus offers for this calling and the boundaries necessary for the pastor to give up the good for the better and the better for the best. Verse one "be strengthened in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" is a present passive imperative of *endunamoo*. By living richly in the Word for the sake of the gospel, the Spirit keeps us strong, makes lighter our heavy loads, and provides pastoral parameters to keep us from slipping into deadly dark holes.

THE SEDUCTION OF EXTREMES

A highly respected Southern Baptist pastor said recently that pastors in his denomination get into trouble when they approach ministry with one of two attitudes. If they carry into the Office of the Holy Ministry a "my way or the highway" approach, or if they seek to be a "consensus appeaser," they invariably run amuck.

- How does the Holy Spirit through Holy Scripture navigate us away from these two extremes?
- Read 1 Peter 5:1-5 and locate the golden middle paradox God gives pastors for avoiding these extremes. How is the pastor simultaneously both an overseer and under-roller (galley slave)?
- Pay close attention to how 1 Peter 5:1 hearkens back to John 13:4-5 to put on the apron of humility. How do these verses temper the pastor's role of "overseeing" without extinguishing functional aspects of the pastors calling? (1 Timothy 3:1-7)

At the same time (simul), the pastor is to be a servant par excellent as well as an overseer. One of our district vice presidents/pastor when asked what he does for a living says, "I am a foot washer" to accentuate the servant nature of the Office of the Holy Ministry. The "elders" (v.1) were the pastors of the various congregations to which Peter was writing. Catch how the apostle did not hesitate to consider himself to be a fellow elder. All of them were under the tutelage of the Master Shepherd.

AVOIDING TENSION DEFICIT DISORDER

Peter reveals a picture of the pastorate that avoids tension deficit disorder. He reveals the tension of the pastor being not only sinner-saint but also a servant-leader. The overseer is an undershepherd who is also a beggar from the royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9; 5:7) serving the God-Man who became the greatest of all slaves to set people free.

Read 1 Peter 5:7.

- How does this verse imply pastors are to be continual blessed beggars?
- How does this Petrine passage connect with the first beatitude of the Master Shepherd, the Lord Jesus? (Matthew 5:3)
- What hit-and-miss practice makes ministry much more miserable? (1 Peter 5:7)
- How does this omission shape the pastor's call more into his own image and a law driven image at that?

Koberle in his *The Quest For Holiness* asserts how prayer helps us to escape the danger of disorder and confusion, discern God's will, and best exercise faith in the hand that daily appropriates God's blessings. Implicit here is that our prayer life has been kindled by the words of Scripture. "A prayer life that does not stick to Scripture will soon become poor in ideas, poor in faith, poor in love, and will finally die." (Koberle pp. 174-177) The author of this document

has three brother pastors with whom he prays over the phone on a regular basis and a host of other pastors with whom he prays for specific needs.

In Paul's letters, we see the apostle had a long list of prayer partners. Have we lost substantial blessings for failure to robustly exercise the great gift of prayer with fellow pastors?

A Texas LCMS pastor made use of the gift of prayer in a most practical way. It was designed to help him to be faithful to Christ's call and not let well-meaning saints wear him out with well-intended, but potentially overwhelming less essential requests. When these saints came to him with a request he said, "Let me pray about this." He reported that 80 percent of the saints never did get back to him on their requests. They just wanted someone to listen to them. "Prayer saved me a lot of work," he said. "I honored their request and unless God's providential hand made their requests clear, I stuck with my Word and Sacrament ministry."

BEAUTIFUL BIBLICAL BALANCE

This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. (1 Corinthians 4:1)

React to the following statement made by a Lutheran layman, an engineer, who served on the Board of Elders of his congregation off and on for twenty years. He said, "I want my pastor to be a steward of God's mysteries and not a practitioner of mechanics."

- How does Jesus through 1 Corinthians 4:1 inspire Paul to steer pastors between the extreme of being a CEO with too much control or a man with only ardor and absolutely no order?

As Servants of Christ (*huperetas Christou*), Paul and all ministers of Christ (*diakonas*, 1 Corinthians 3:5) are under-rowers, subordinate rowers of Christ's ship the Church. Stewards of the mysteries of God (*oikonomos musterion theou*) suggests "house" (*oikos*) and "manager" (*nemo*), a person who was a slave under the greatest Slave ever (Jesus). As under-rowers and overseers, under the Master Shepherd, we are to be the most loving masters possible, ever wearing the apron of humility.

BRILLIANT IN THE BASICS

All of Scripture equips the pastor for the noble work as an undershepherd in Christ. (2 Timothy 3:16; 1 Timothy 3:1) From Acts 20:17-28 to Ezekiel 34, we see how the undershepherd of the Good Shepherd is to lead and feed the sheep guarding the gospel and being guarded by it. (2 Timothy 1:12, 14) Paul captures a huge chunk of pastoral landscape when he writes:

I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ! (Acts 20:28)

To not to shrink from arduous agonizing aspects of our call and not let the call become more burdensome than Jesus intends it, the Holy Spirit reminds us to be brilliant in the basics. St. Paul says it all in 1 Corinthians 14:1. *Follow, then, the way of Jesus' love, while you at the same time set your heart on the gifts of the Spirit. The highest gift you can wish for is to be able to speak faithfully the Word of God.* (Free Translation)

- Without the first of these two *sine quo non* essentials, our pastoral ministry will sound like what? (1 Corinthians 13:1)
- Without the second of these *sine qua non* Holy Spirit marks, our ministry will be what? (1 Corinthians 15:2)

Without sound doctrine, doctrine given for the sake of the gospel, the ministry will be “in vain,” “empty,” “meaningless.” (1 Corinthians 15:2) Without Jesus’ love pouring through our pores, our words will be hollow, like the sound of the gong on the old gong show. (1 Corinthians 4:1) Jesus’ love and sound doctrine for the sake of the gospel are to be the Alpha and Omega marks of an orthodox vibrant ministry. In 1 Corinthians 14:1, Paul uses a strong verb for pursuing Jesus’ cross-centered, Word and Sacrament love with all our might. “Pursue” pictures the veritable chase imagery of running after Jesus’ love with all your might, always aware that it is He who first found us. All of this is done for the sake of the gospel. (1 Corinthians 9:23)

3. From our Lutheran Perspective

Martin Luther stated that three things make a theologian.

Drawing especially from Psalm 119 he set these forth in the famous Latin phrase: *oratio, meditatio, tentatio faciunt theologum*. Prayer, meditation on God’s Word, and deep spiritual struggle makes the theologian.

- How does this three-fold alchemy lighten the burden of a pastor and at the same keep him from reconfiguring the call into the Holy Ministry as one according to the pastor’s ease?

Luther’s famous paradox that every believer in Christ is *simul iustus et peccator* (at the same time saint and sinner) signals how there is a tall temptation for the sinner-saint pastor to allow his Old Adam to tinker with the Office of the Holy Ministry, turning it into a law-driven office. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “an arrogant tone on the pastor’s part is totally devastating.”

- What uneasy task must the pastor daily apply in light of the reality of *simul iustus et peccator* to prepare for spiritual warfare and to be ready rightly to feed the sheep?

The first person daily to hear law and gospel is the pastor. His self-righteousness that gives vibes of superiority, his arrogance to reconfigure Christ’s call, his haughtiness to think that he can conduct ministry with minimalistic prayer are various signs of the disease of ease running the call and likely ruining lives. At the same time, the pastor is comforted by the saving grace of Jesus Christ who alone was the One faithful shepherd and whose Divine blood and infinite love for us keeps us in the one true faith in Jesus.

Dr. John Fritz in his *Pastoral Theology* reminds us that the words of an old writer still hold true: a holy pastor has but three books to study—the Scriptures, himself, and his flock. Fritz later quotes “Take heed unto thyself” (1 Timothy 4:16) as a proof text. Fair enough. Perhaps he might have quoted what comes after: *Watch your life and doctrine closely*.

The Bible enables us to see ourselves. It is our interpreter of reality.

- In light of Scripture, do you have problems with easing the boundaries of Christ’s call?
- Do you struggle with extraneous requests?
- Who and what are your mirrors in service of the gospel, knowing self, and knowing what pushes your buttons?

C.F.W. Walther at the apex of his ministry declared to pastors, “You are not rightly distinguishing Law and Gospel in the Word of God if you do not allow the Gospel to predominate in your teaching.”

Certainly this grand thesis applies not only to our preaching, but also to our teaching and visitations.

- If we attempt to control the sheep with a “my way or the highway approach,” how does the gospel become the dominant note of our ministry?
- Can we use this approach while also being kind, gentle, and patient with our sheep?

4. Points to Ponder

Serendipity: Read all. Each one selects a point.

- The public person must be a private person or he is not very good in the public. (Elton Trueblood)
- In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus often departed from the crowds in high stress situations in order to pray to His Father in heaven for strength to meet the crushing demands of His ministry. (Matthew 4:12; 12:15; 14:13)
- Where and when do we pray privately and fervently? For pastors there is the time-honored distinction that an undershepherd of Christ should have a place for prayer and study, and a place for his office. We need first to encounter the Burning Bush lest we are perpetually bushed.
- The man of God who wrote *rejoice in the Lord always* (Philippians 4:4) also wrote *we were unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself*. (2 Corinthians 1:8) Contradiction or paradox?
- Dr. Robert Sauer, former first vice president of Synod, said the key to a faithful ministry (he did not use the slippery word “successful”) is to have a deep devotional life, get to the sermon early, and visit the saints. What else could be added to this agenda?
- A theology of glory is according to a pastor’s liking. A theology of the cross is according to the Shepherd’s assignment. The first moves to creating God in our own image. The second moves to being conformed to the image of God’s beloved Son. How can we grow more toward the theology of the cross?

5. For Conversation

One of the most frequent criticisms District Presidents hear of pastors is that they neglect to make personal calls on the members of the congregation. A former District President, James Kalthoff said, “I do not place the fault on this entirely on the pastors. Congregations have a multitude of meetings the pastor is expected to attend. The pastor’s work also involves administrative tasks, preparations for sermons and Bible studies, funerals, etc., coupled with his need to spend some worthwhile time with his family. Responsibilities such as these have contributed to the demise of pastoral visitation.”

St. Augustine reminds us of the Seelsorge “cure of souls” aspect of the pastor’s call. Summarizing a good chunk of the Pastoral Epistles, he writes:

“Disturbers are to be rebuked, the low-spirited to be encouraged, the infirm to be supported, objectors confuted, the treacherous guarded against, the unskilled taught, the lazy aroused, the contentious constrained, the haughty repressed, litigants pacified, the poor relieved, the oppressed liberated, the good approved, the evil borne with, and **all are to be loved.**”

One LCMS pastor said the call of the undershepherd is to tell the sheep all the fabulous facets of the saving work of the Good Shepherd, teach the sheep to pray to the Good Shepherd, and guard, serve, love, and lead the sheep to the Shepherd’s pastures of Word and Sacrament and Christian fellowship.

What else could be added?

Closing Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, our Good Shepherd, we thank You for laying down your life for us. We thank You for the privilege of our high calling and the fact that it is hard so that our sufficiency might be in Your grace and not in ourselves. Help us to fan the flame of faith through Your strong Word with a deep devotional life lest we become starving cooks. Forgive us where we have occupied molehills and defended them as if they were Mt. Everest. Instead, help us to stand at the break of day at the foot of Mt. Calvary conforming us to Your image, contouring our steps as undershepherds according to Your call, and stripping ourselves of the desire to control. Enable us to lead Your sheep in Your way through Your means of grace to follow Philadelphia footsteps.(Revelation 3:8) Finally Lord Jesus, help us to think carefully and act wisely on engaging thoroughly in the mutual consolation of brothers. Amen.

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